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(DETAILS INSIDE)
KING CONAN
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ALL NEW! A DOUBLE-LENGTH ACTION EPIC!
DRAGON-WINGS OVER ZEMBABWEI!

"Know, O prince, that the man called Conan was all things in his day: a thief, a reaver, a slayer... fierce sellsword and fiercer pirate... and finally, usurper king of proud, civilized Aquilonia, mightiest of Hyborian kingdoms... with his queen Zenobia at his side, and his son Prince Conn ripe to carry on the legend..."

—*The Nemedian Chronicles.*

Stan Lee PRESENTS: **KING CONAN**

Featuring The Epic Adventurer Created By **ROBERT E. HOWARD**

RED MOON OF ZEMBABWEI!

ADAPTED FROM THE STORY BY L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP & LIN CARTER

FEATURING THE HERO CREATED BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

THE RAINY SEASON HAS COME TO UPPER ZEMBABWEI... BUT SO HAS CONAN OF AQUILONIA.
FOR MORE THAN A MONTH, THE CIMMERIAN-BORN MONARCH HAS DRIVEN HIS ADOPTED LAND'S HOST ON AND ON, FOLLOWING THE COURSE OF THE RIVER STYX SOUTH TOWARD ITS UNKNOWN SOURCE, TILL EVEN HIS OWN SON PRINCE CONN FEELS THE WEARINESS THAT COMES TO PURSUERS...
FATHER-- HOW MUCH LONGER BEFORE WE'RE OUT OF THIS VILE SWAMP?
MY TUTORS TAUGHT ME THAT ZEMBABWEI IS MARKED BY EVER-GLADE FLATLANDS IN THE NORTH-- NOT MARSHES.
THE BOUNDARIES OF KINGDOMS ARE SELDOM MARKED BY LINES, AS THEY ARE ON SCHOLARS' MAPS, CONN.
BUT, WE'LL REACH ZEMBABWEI'S BORDER SOON, AND HAVE DONE WITH THE SWAMPS OF SOUTHERN PUNT.
KEEP MOVING, ALL!
ROY THOMAS WRITER / EDITOR
JOHN BUSCEMA ARTIST
DANNY BULANADI EMBELLISHER
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JIM SHOOTER CONSULTING EDITOR

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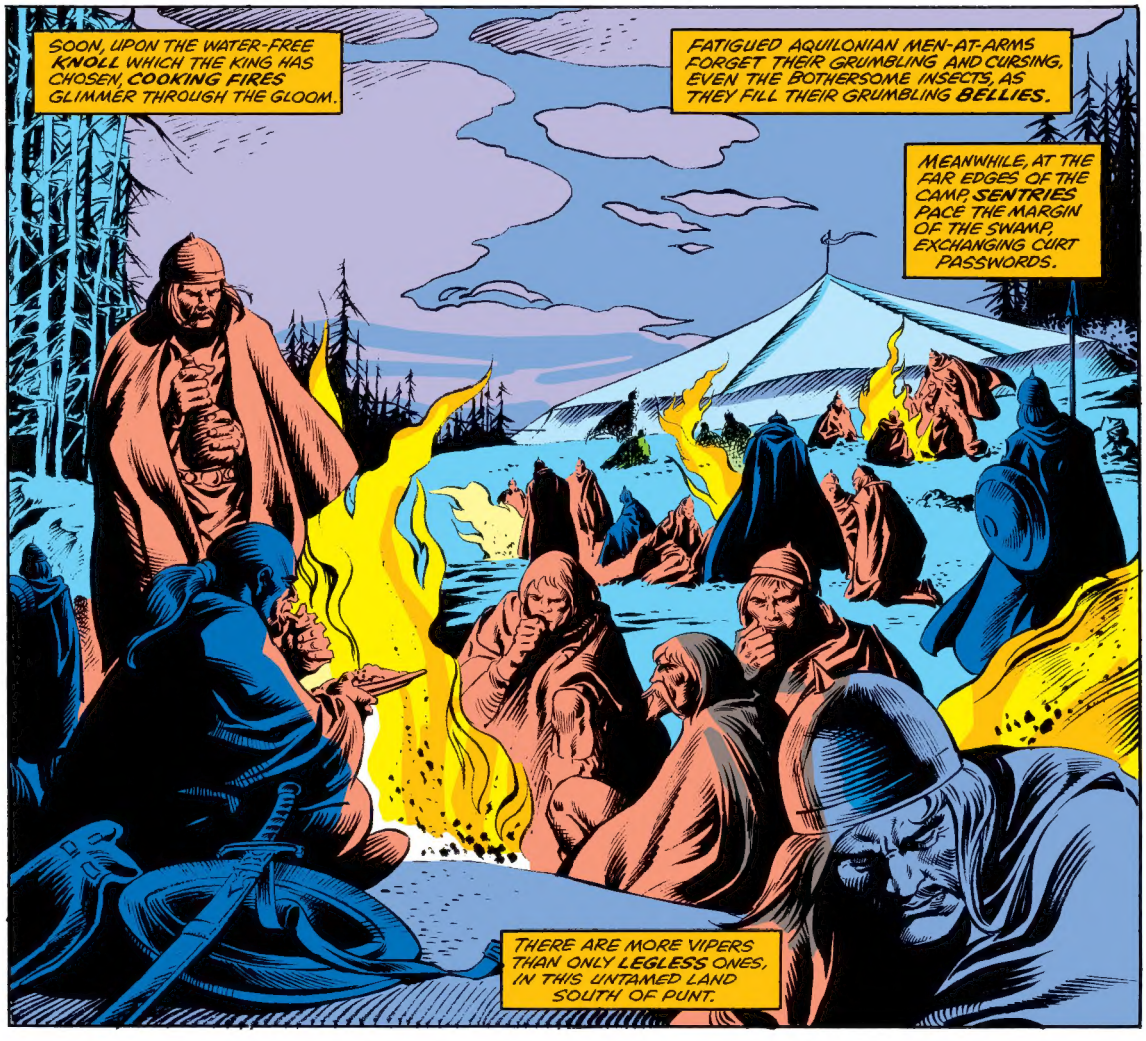
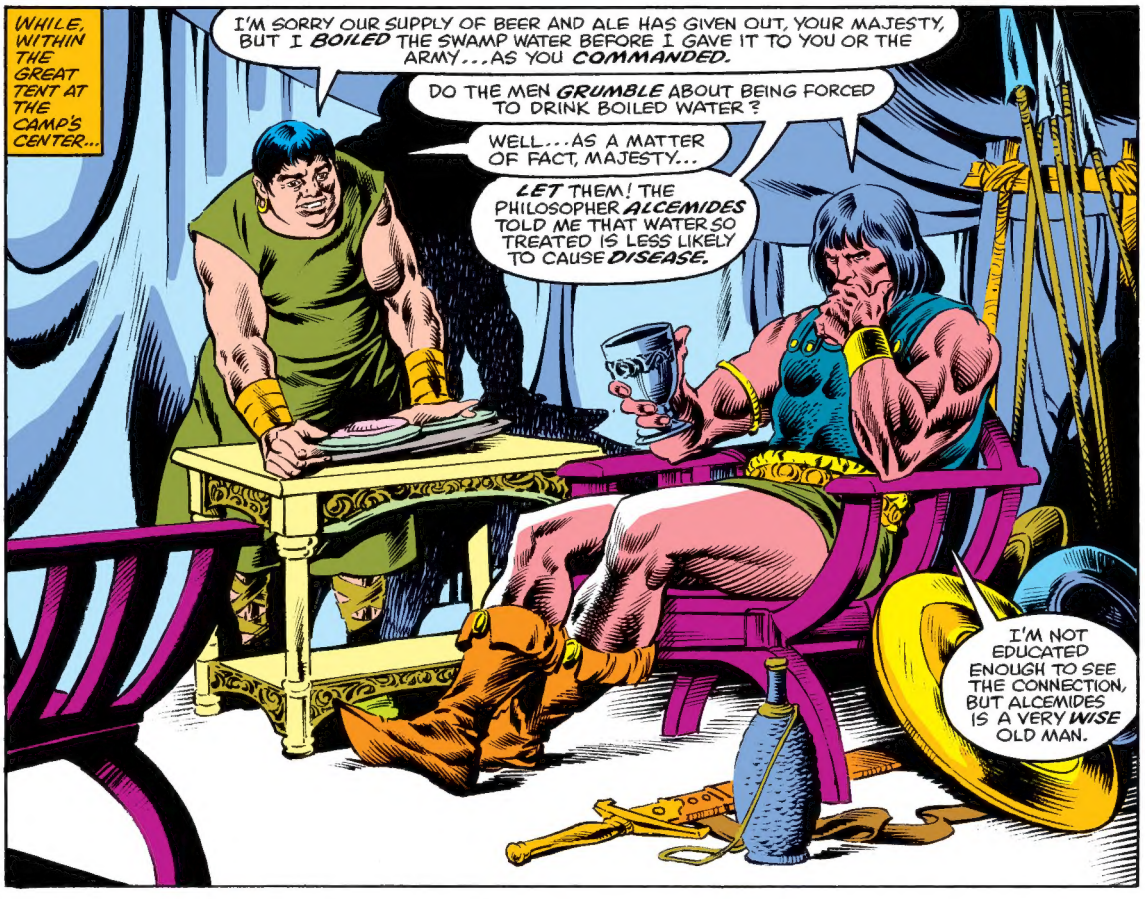
WHILE, JUST OUT OF EARSHOT...
LOOKS LIKE RAIN, EH, PALLANTIDES?
BY MITRA, TELL ME SOMETHING NEW, COUNT TROCERO!
IT'S RAINED EVERY DAY FOR THE PAST TEN, TILL I'VE GIVEN UP TRYING TO KEEP THE RUST OFF MY GEAR.
CURSE ME, BUT I WISH THAT OLD TOSSPOT OF A DRUID WERE STILL WITH US!
PERHAPS OLD DIVIATIX COULD HAVE MAGICKED US THROUGH THE AIR TO OLD ZEMBABWEI--OR THE FORBIDDEN CITY, AS ITS VILE INHABITANTS DO CALL IT.
ANYTHING WOULD BE BETTER THAN SLOGGING THROUGH THIS INFERNAL MIRE!
EVEN I MUST AGREE WITH YOU THERE, GENERAL.
I FEAR THAT, BY THE TIME WE REACH THE FORBIDDEN CITY, OUR MEN MAY BE IN NO SHAPE TO FIGHT THE SNAKE-WORSHIPPERS.
STILL, YOU KNOW WHY DIVIATIX HAD TO RETURN NORTH.
AYE. ONLY A WHITE DRUID SUCH AS HE COULD KEEP THE SAVAGE PICTS FROM RISING, WHILE WE'RE BUSY ELSEWHERE.
STILL, TOO BAD HE HAD TO TAKE THE HEART OF AHRIMAN WITH HIM.
IT HAD TO BE RESTORED TO THE GREAT MITRAEUM IN TARANTIA, MY FRIEND...YOU KNOW THAT.
BESIDES, THOUGH CONAN MAY BE THE MIGHTIEST WARRIOR-KING OF OUR AGE, HE IS STILL NO WIZARD...
...AND ONLY A MAGE, OR AT LEAST A DRUID, COULD HAVE USED THAT MAGICAL GEM EFFECTIVELY.
WELL, AT LEAST, BEFORE HE LEFT, DIVIATIX, USED HIS POWERS OF DIVINATION TO TELL US WHERE THOTH-AMON FLED TO.
NOT THAT THE STYGIAN HAD MUCH CHOICE!
THE LEADERS OF THE WHITE HAND OF HYPERBOREA AND OF THE EASTERN SCARLET CIRCLE WERE BOTH CRUSHED AT POHIOLA, MONTHS AGO.*
*ISSUE #1.--R.T.

THERE'S NO REFUGE LEFT FOR THOTH-AMON, SAVE ZEMBABWEI'S FORBIDDEN CITY.
AYE, FOR THERE HIS LAST ALLY--NENAUNIR, THE SUPREME WIZARD OF THE GOD DAMBALLAH, RULES COUNTLESS HORDES FROM HIS SKULL THRONE...OR SO IT'S SAID.
SMALL WONDER, AFTER HIS DEFEAT AT NEBTHU,* THE MASTER OF THE BLACK RING FLED SOUTHWARD.
AND WHERE THOTH-AMON GOES, CAN CONAN BE FAR BEHIND?
*LAST ISSUE. --ROY.

HALT, COMPANY!
NIGHT FALLS SWIFTLY--AND WE CAN ADVANCE NO FURTHER!
"AT LAST WE'VE EMERGED FROM THAT TORTUROUS SWAMP," BREATHES COUNT TROCERO.


SOON, UPON THE WATER-FREE KNOLL WHICH THE KING HAS CHOSEN, COOKING FIRES GLIMMER THROUGH THE GLOOM.
FATIGUED AQUILONIAN MEN-AT-ARMS FORGET THEIR GRUMBLING AND CURSING, EVEN THE BOTHERSOME INSECTS, AS THEY FILL THEIR GRUMBLING BELLIES.
MEANWHILE, AT THE FAR EDGES OF THE CAMP, SENTRIES PACE THE MARGIN OF THE SWAMP, EXCHANGING CURT PASSWORDS.
THERE ARE MORE VIPERS THAN ONLY LEGLESS ONES, IN THIS UNTAMED LAND SOUTH OF PUNT.

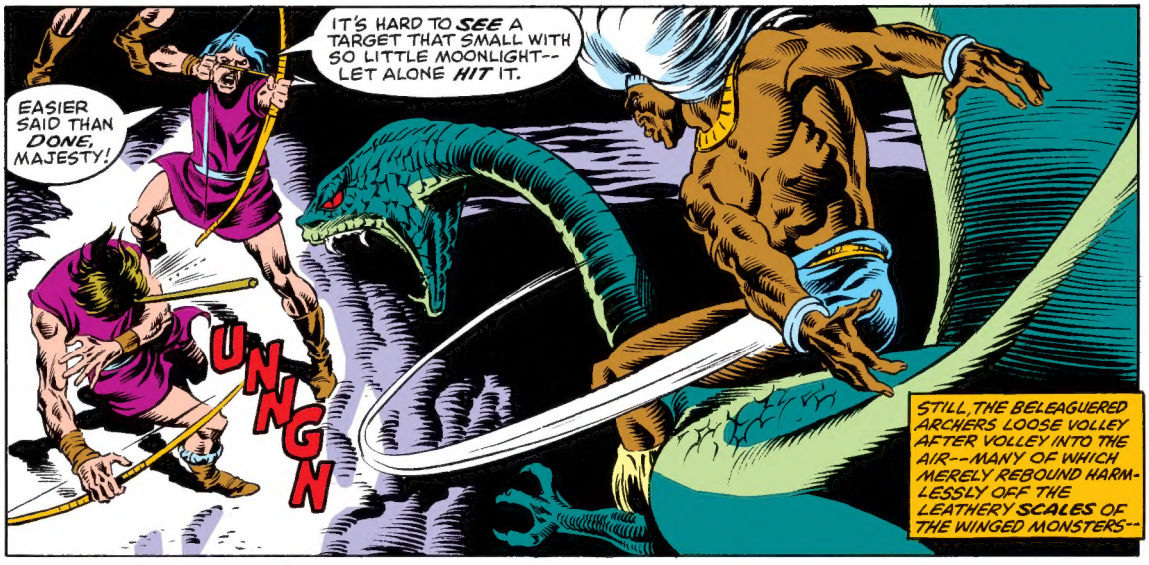

WHILE, WITHIN THE GREAT TENT AT THE CAMP'S CENTER...
I'M SORRY OUR SUPPLY OF BEER AND ALE HAS GIVEN OUT, YOUR MAJESTY, BUT I BOILED THE SWAMP WATER BEFORE I GAVE IT TO YOU OR THE ARMY...AS YOU COMMANDED.
DO THE MEN GRUMBLE ABOUT BEING FORCED TO DRINK BOILED WATER?
WELL...AS A MATTER OF FACT, MAJESTY...
LET THEM! THE PHILOSOPHER ALCEMIDES TOLD ME THAT WATER SO TREATED IS LESS LIKELY TO CAUSE DISEASE.
I'M NOT EDUCATED ENOUGH TO SEE THE CONNECTION, BUT ALCEMIDES IS A VERY WISE OLD MAN.

AH...CONN! HAVE YOU GROOMED THE MOUNTS ALREADY?
YES, FATHER. BUT YOURS TRIED TO BITE ME.
HORSES AREN'T VERY BRIGHT; YOU HAVE TO LEARN TO HANDLE THE BRUTES.
ANYWAY, HAVE SOME FOOD... SUCH AS IT IS.

I MISS THAT BLACK STEED OF YOURS...THE ONE CALLED YMIR, AFTER THAT NORTHERN GOD.
SO DO I, SON. WHEN WE GO NORTH, I'LL MAKE THE KOTHIANS AND OPHIREANS RETURN HIM, IF I HAVE TO TURN THEIR KINGDOMS INSIDE OUT.
CURSE THOSE DOGS, ANYWAY! BAD ENOUGH THEY DESERTED, WITHOUT TAKING MANY OF OUR BEST HORSES!*
*LAST ISSUE. --R.

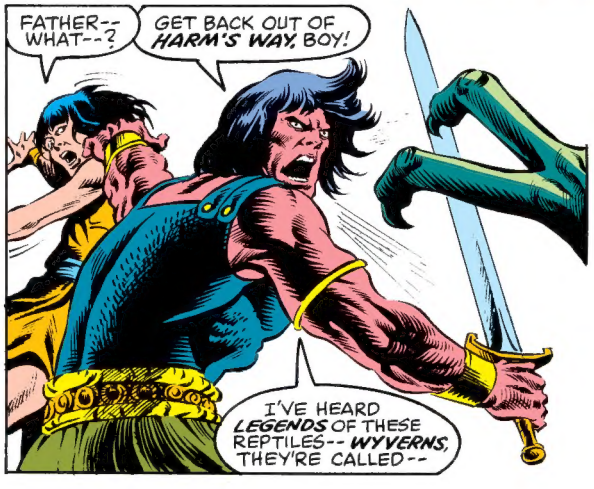
MMMM... THAT BOILED STEAK ISN'T HALF BAD.
IS COUNT TROCERO STILL TRYING TO GET YOU TO SEND ME BACK TO TARANTIA, FATHER?
HE HAS AQUILONIA'S BEST INTERESTS AT HEART, AT LEAST AS HE SEES THEM.
NONE OF MY COUNCILORS LIKE THE IDEA OF BOTH MYSELF AND MY HEIR BEING HERE.
BUT, I THINK IT BETTER FOR THE NEXT KING OF AQUILONIA TO LEARN OF WARFARE IN THE FIELD, NOT FROM DUSTY BOOKS.
WELL, BEST TOUR THE CAMP BEFORE WE TURN IN; I'LL SLEEP BETTER IF I KNOW ALL IS SECURE.
BUT, IT SEEMS TO BE-- EH?
WHAT'S THAT SUDDEN UPROAR-- ARISING AT CAMP'S EDGE?
SOUND THE TRUMPETS, MAN! WE ARE ATTACKED!
BUT-- BY WHOM? I SEE NO ENEMY... NOR HEAR ANY HORSES' HOOVES.
CAN'T YOU HEAR? THAT SOUND-- COMING OUT OF THE VERY SKY!
WHAT BUT SORCERY COULD CAUSE SUCH A ROAR-- SO LOUD I CAN SCARCELY HEAR MYSELF SHOUT!
STRANGE SOUND! IT REMINDS ME, MORE THAN ANYTHING, OF THE BOOM OF SAILS AS THEY FILLED WITH A GUSTY WIND, BACK IN MY PIRATE DAYS.
BUT-- WHAT'S THAT, JUST ABOVE THE HORIZON-- HALF OBSCURED BY THE MISTS?
A'EEE! LOOK THERE-- AGAINST THE CRESCENT MOON!
WHAT IN CROM'S NAME--?

MEN-- RIDING FLAME-EYED FLYING DEMONS FROM HELL!
ARCHERS-- LOOSE YOUR ARROWS!
THAT'S A COMMAND YOU WON'T NEED TO GIVE TWICE, CAP'N!
THE BOSSONIAN ARCHERS, FROM THE WESTERN MARCHES 'TWIXT GREATER AQUILONIA AND PICTLAND, ARE THE BEST BOWMEN IN ALL THE WORLD--
--AS THE EERIE ATTACKERS SOON LEARN!
AAAAAIII!
MOTHER OF MITRA-- THE THINGS ARE TAME!
SHOOT THE RIDERS OFF THEIR BACKS, THEN-- AND WE'LL HAVE NO MORE TO FEAR FROM THEM!

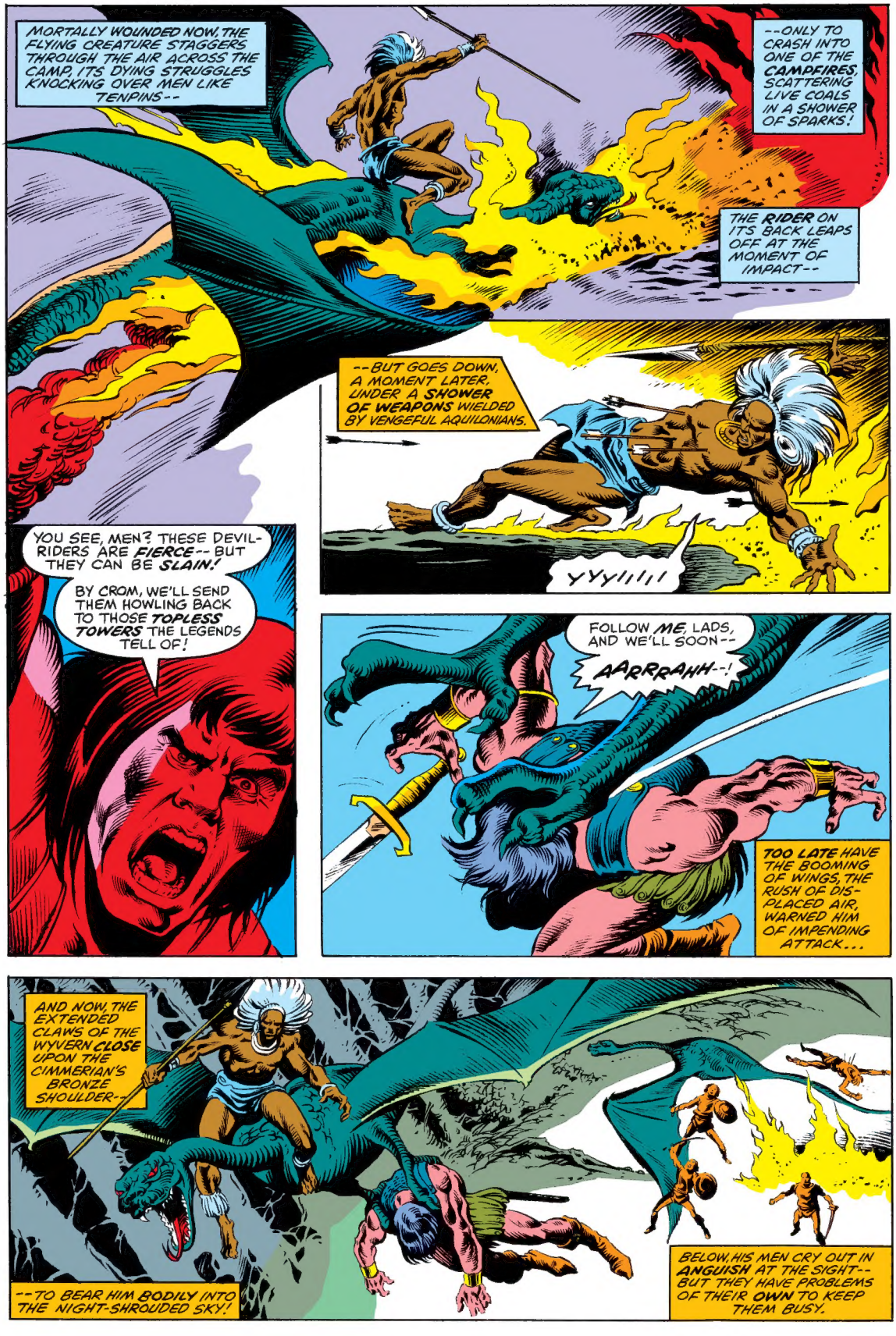

IT'S HARD TO SEE A TARGET THAT SMALL WITH SO LITTLE MOONLIGHT-- LET ALONE HIT IT.
EASIER SAID THAN DONE, MAJESTY!
UNNGN
STILL, THE BELEAGUERED ARCHERS LOOSE VOLLEY AFTER VOLLEY INTO THE AIR--MANY OF WHICH MERELY REBOUND HARMLESSLY OFF THE LEATHERY SCALES OF THE WINGED MONSTERS--

--WHILE OTHER SWOOPING GARGOYLES GO FOR THE ARMY'S HORSES--
WHNEEEEE

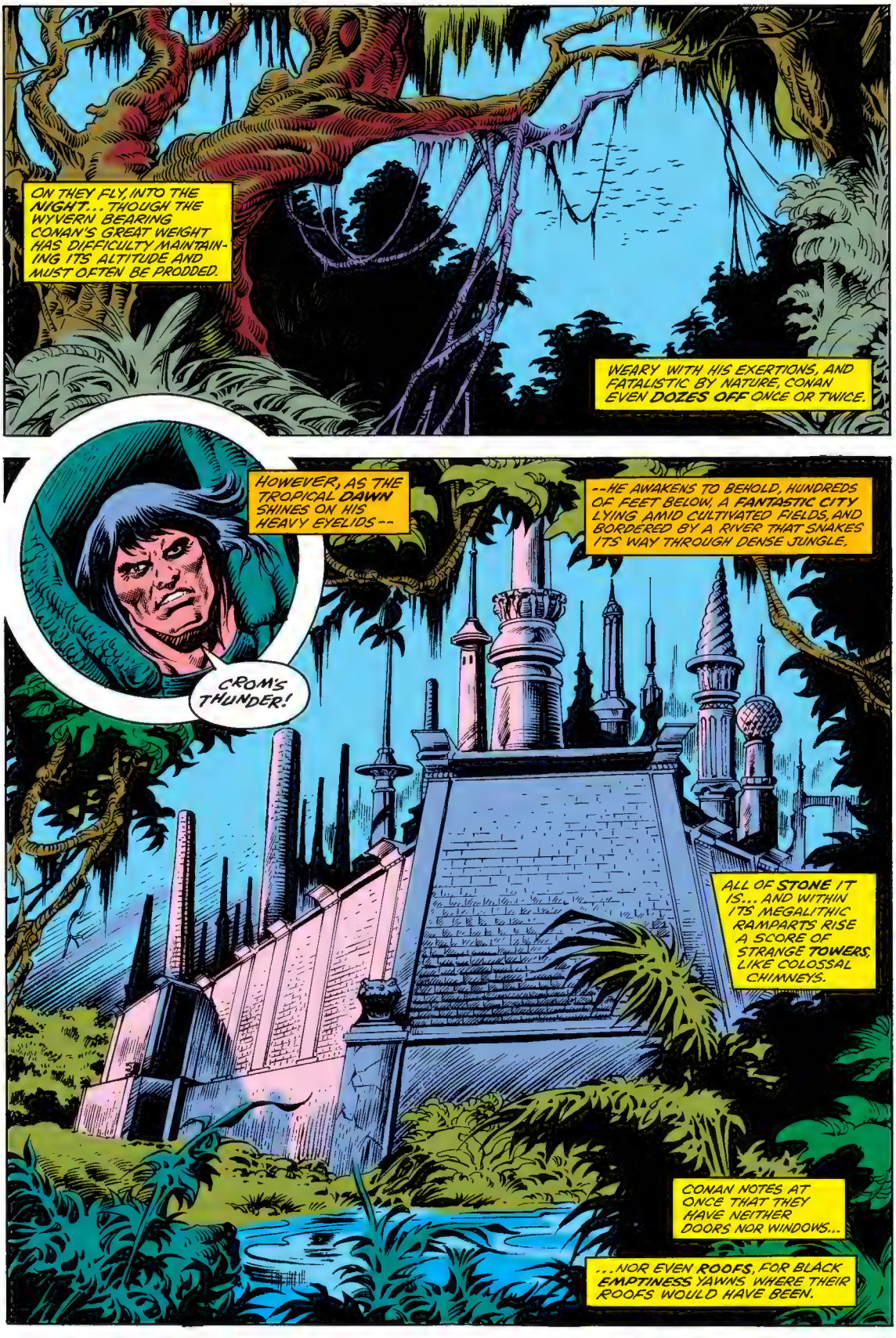
--AND STILL OTHERS SWOOP DOWN AMID THE AQUILONIAN HOST ITSELF.


FATHER-- WHAT--?
GET BACK OUT OF HARM'S WAY, BOY!
I'VE HEARD LEGENDS OF THESE REPTILES-- WYVERNS, THEY'RE CALLED--

AND, WHAT'S MORE TO THE POINT--
--IN MY DAY, I'VE FOUGHT DEVILS THAT WOULD MAKE THESE SEEM LIKE TOADS BY COMPARISON!
CROM, THOUGH-- I WISH, EVEN DYING, THEY MADE SOME SOUND.


MORTALLY WOUNDED NOW, THE FLYING CREATURE STAGGERS THROUGH THE AIR ACROSS THE CAMP, ITS DYING STRUGGLES KNOCKING OVER MEN LIKE TENPINS--
--ONLY TO CRASH INTO ONE OF THE CAMPFIRES, SCATTERING LIVE COALS IN A SHOWER OF SPARKS!
THE RIDER ON ITS BACK LEAPS OFF AT THE MOMENT OF IMPACT--
--BUT GOES DOWN, A MOMENT LATER, UNDER A SHOWER OF WEAPONS WIELDED BY VENGEFUL AQUILONIANS.
YYyyIIII
YOU SEE, MEN? THESE DEVIL-RIDERS ARE FIERCE-- BUT THEY CAN BE SLAIN!
BY CROM, WE'LL SEND THEM HOWLING BACK TO THOSE TOPLESS TOWERS THE LEGENDS TELL OF!
FOLLOW ME, LADS, AND WE'LL SOON--
AARRRAHH--!
TOO LATE HAVE THE BOOMING OF WINGS, THE RUSH OF DISPLACED AIR, WARNED HIM OF IMPENDING ATTACK...
AND NOW, THE EXTENDED CLAWS OF THE WYVERN CLOSE UPON THE CIMMERIAN'S BRONZE SHOULDER--
--TO BEAR HIM BODILY INTO THE NIGHT-SHROUDED SKY!
BELOW, HIS MEN CRY OUT IN ANGUISH AT THE SIGHT-- BUT THEY HAVE PROBLEMS OF THEIR OWN TO KEEP THEM BUSY.

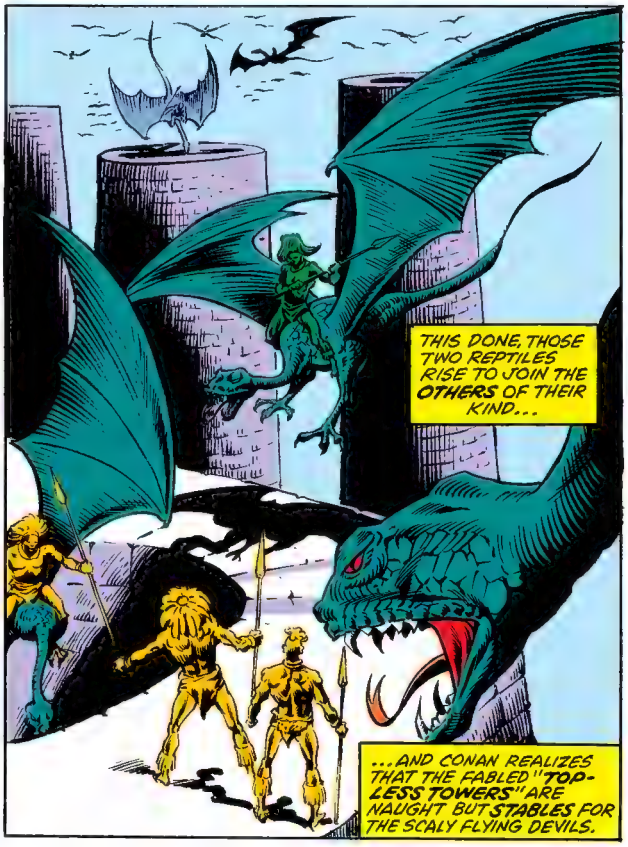
THE WIND, TEARING PAST THE KING, HELPS HIM GATHER HIS SCATTERED WITS...
...AND HE REALIZES WITH A SILENT CURSE THAT THE SWORD HAS BEEN KNOCKED FROM HIS HAND.
HIS DAGGER, HE RECALLS, HE LEFT IN HIS TENT.
YET, AS HE GLANCES AT THE DARK GROUND SINKING AWAY BELOW HIM--
--HE SENSES THAT NEITHER SWORD NOR DAGGER WOULD DO HIM MUCH GOOD AT THIS MOMENT.
BEST NOT TO STRUGGLE OVERMUCH, LEST THE WYVERN DROP HIM TO HIS DEATH.
GOOD THING, AT LEAST, THAT HIS MAILSHIRT PROTECTS HIS HIDE FROM THE BEAST'S HUGE CLAWS.
THEN-- A SUDDEN CRY FROM BEHIND HIM--
FATHER--!
WHAT--?
PRINCE CONN!
NEITHER FATHER NOR SON CAN MAKE OUT ANY MORE WORDS, ABOVE THE BEATING OF GARGANTUAN WINGS...
...AS THE SECOND WYVERN DRAWS ABREAST OF THE FIRST.
THEN, BOTH SOAR AWAY, THEIR FELLOWS NOT FAR BEHIND.
BUT THEN, REASONS CONAN, WHY SLASH AT A LION'S FEET, WHEN YOU HAVE CUT OFF ITS HEAD... AND ITS HEART?


ON THEY FLY, INTO THE NIGHT... THOUGH THE WYVERN BEARING CONAN'S GREAT WEIGHT HAS DIFFICULTY MAINTAINING ITS ALTITUDE AND MUST OFTEN BE PRODDED.
WEARY WITH HIS EXERTIONS, AND FATALISTIC BY NATURE, CONAN EVEN DOZES OFF ONCE OR TWICE.
HOWEVER, AS THE TROPICAL DAWN SHINES ON HIS HEAVY EYELIDS--
CROM'S THUNDER!
--HE AWAKENS TO BEHOLD, HUNDREDS OF FEET BELOW, A FANTASTIC CITY LYING AMID CULTIVATED FIELDS, AND BORDERED BY A RIVER THAT SNAKES ITS WAY THROUGH DENSE JUNGLE,
ALL OF STONE IT IS... AND WITHIN ITS MEGALITHIC RAMPARTS RISE A SCORE OF STRANGE TOWERS, LIKE COLOSSAL CHIMNEYS.
CONAN NOTES AT ONCE THAT THEY HAVE NEITHER DOORS NOR WINDOWS...
...NOR EVEN ROOFS, FOR BLACK EMPTINESS YAWNS WHERE THEIR ROOFS WOULD HAVE BEEN.

HERE, IT'S SAID, MEN WORSHIP SET, THE OLD SERPENT, UNDER THE NAME OF DAMBALLAH, BEFORE AN ALTAR THAT OFT RUNS CRIMSON.
IT IS EVEN WHISPERED THAT, ON THE NIGHT OF HUMAN SACRIFICE, THE VERY MOON ITSELF BURNS RED WITH THE BLOOD OF THOSE WHOSE SOULS ARE OFFERED UP TO DAMBALLAH.

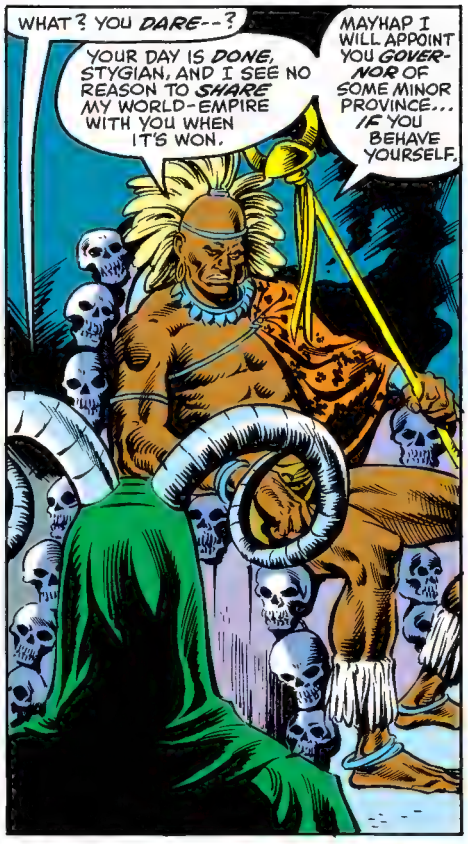
A GOOD PLACE, CONAN MUSES, FOR HIS FINAL BATTLE WITH THAT SNAKE-WORSHIPPING STYGIAN, THOTH-AMON.
RIGHT NOW, HOWEVER, IT IS A HOST OF ARMED, STALWART ZEMBABWANS WHO RING THE CITY'S CENTRAL PLAZA...

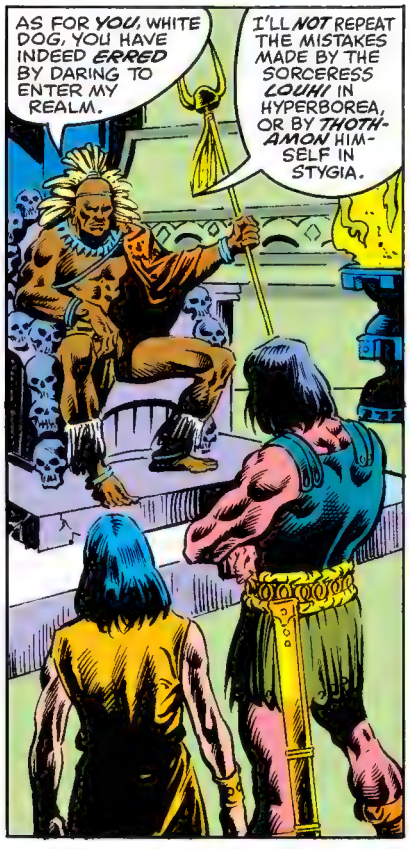
...INTO WHOSE MIDST HE AND YOUNG CONN ARE UNCEREMONIOUSLY DROPPED.
YOU ALL RIGHT, LAD?
YES, FATHER.


THIS DONE, THOSE TWO REPTILES RISE TO JOIN THE OTHERS OF THEIR KIND...
...AND CONAN REALIZES THAT THE FABLED "TOPLESS TOWERS" ARE NAUGHT BUT STABLES FOR THE SCALY FLYING DEVILS.

SHALL WE TRY TO ESCAPE, SIRE?
THEY WOULDN'T BE EXPECTING US TO BE IN SHAPE FOR FIGHTING AFTER THAT LONG FLIGHT, AND WE MIGHT JUST--
YOU ARE BRAVE, BOY, BUT IT'S NOT LIKELY WE COULD--
WE MEET AGAIN, DOG OF CIMMERIA!
AYE-- FOR THE LAST TIME, JACKAL OF STYGIA!
AT CLOSE RANGE, CONAN SEES THAT THOTH-AMON IS STILL A POWERFUL, COMMANDING FIGURE... YET HIS KEEN EYES DETECT SIGNS OF ENCROACHING AGE IN THOSE HAWKLIKE FEATURES.
ARE THE STYGIAN'S POWERS AT LAST ON THE WANE, AFTER SO MANY LONG YEARS?
FOR THE LAST TIME, DID YOU SAY? AYE, INDEED...
...NOR SHALL WE FENCE WITH WORDS, BUT I WILL SLAY YOU NOW WHERE YOU STAND, AND YOUR CUB BESIDE YOU!
THE WEST SHALL YET FALL, AND SET SHALL AGAIN EXTEND HIS RULE OVER THE EARTH, WHEN I SIT AS EMPEROR IN TARANTIA, CAPITAL OF AQUILONIA!
THEY'D PUT A REAL SNAKE ON THE RUBY THRONE FIRST!
AS I SAID: I'VE NO TASTE FOR MINCING WORDS.
PREPARE FOR DEATH!
I'M AS READY AS I'LL EVER BE, SCUM OF THE SOUTH!
HALT!
BY THE SPAWN OF DAMBALLAH, STYGIAN -- DO YOU FORGET WHO KINGS IT HERE?
AND APPROACHING THE SKULL THRONE IS NENAUNIR, WIZARD-KING OF ZEMBABWEI... THE LAST OF THOTH-AMON'S SORCEROUS ALLIES.

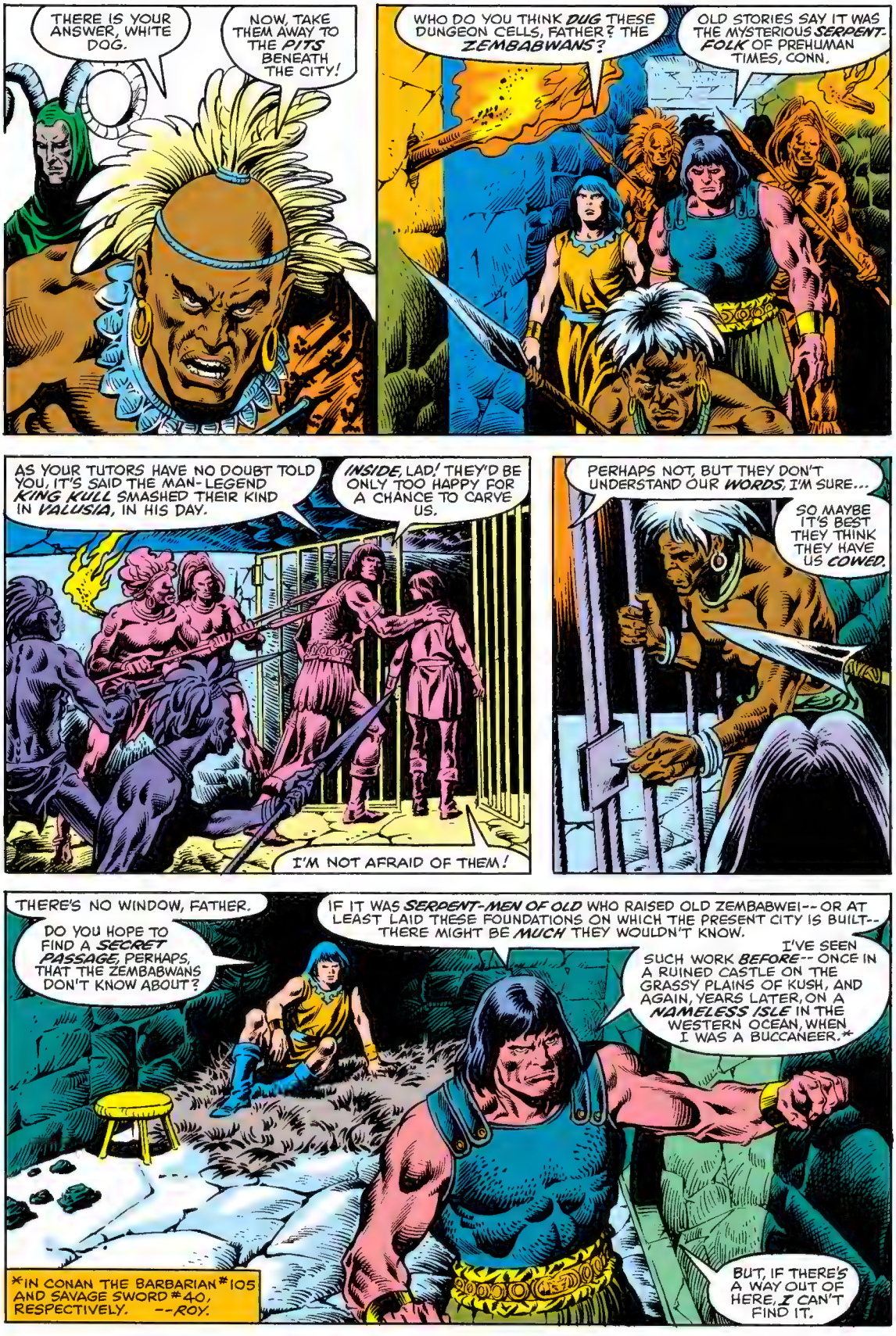
I-- OF COURSE, BROTHER, YOU ARE SUPREME HERE; STILL, OUR MINDS HOLD THE SAME GREAT SCHEME OF EMPIRE, DO THEY NOT?
YOU SHALL RULE THE SOUTH... I, THE LANDS TO THE NORTH.
WE SHALL DIVIDE THE WORLD, WHICH SHALL HENCEFORTH GROVEL BEFORE FATHER SET...
BEFORE LORD DAMBALLAH, YOU MEAN-- WHOSE PROPHET AND VICAR ON THIS PLANE I AM!


WHAT? YOU DARE--?
YOUR DAY IS DONE, STYGIAN, AND I SEE NO REASON TO SHARE MY WORLD-EMPIRE WITH YOU WHEN IT'S WON.
MAYHAP I WILL APPOINT YOU GOVERNOR OF SOME MINOR PROVINCE... IF YOU BEHAVE YOURSELF.

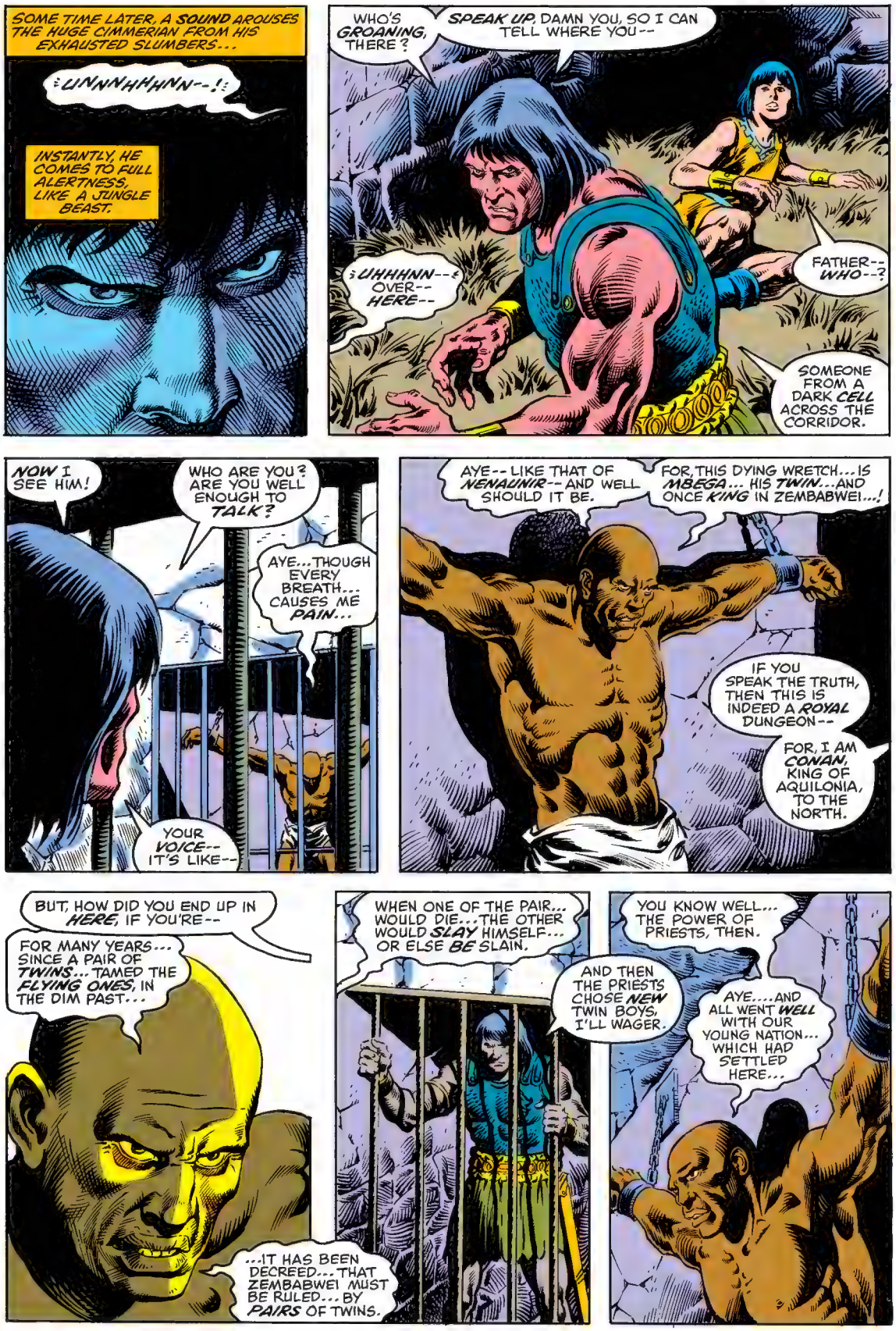

AS FOR YOU, WHITE DOG, YOU HAVE INDEED ERRED BY DARING TO ENTER MY REALM.
I'LL NOT REPEAT THE MISTAKES MADE BY THE SORCERESS LOUHI IN HYPERBOREA, OR BY THOTH-AMON HIMSELF IN STYGIA.

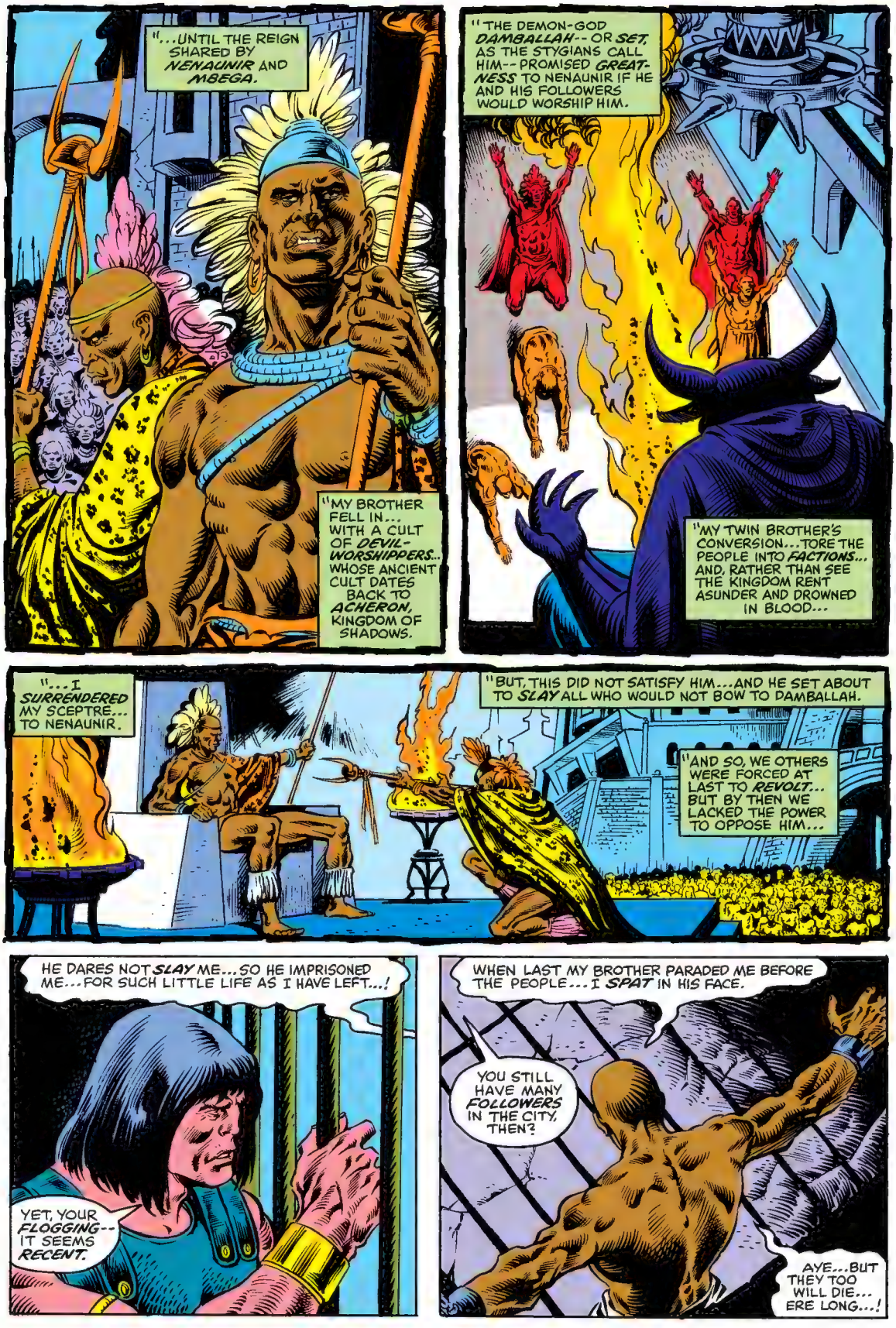
I SHALL PRONOUNCE YOUR DOOM ON THE NIGHT OF THE RED MOON.
AT THAT TIME, YOUR BLOOD SHALL RUN SCARLET ON THE ALTARS OF THE SLITHERING GOD, WHILE YOUR SOUL GOES SHRIEKING FORTH TO FEED THE HUNGER OF DAMBALLAH.
AND JUST WHEN IS ALL THIS TO TAKE PLACE?

YOU ARE INSOLENT, AS ALWAYS.
RIMUSH! THE STARS ARE YOUR CONCERN. WHEN COMES THE NIGHT OF THE RED MOON?
IF SOME GOD INTERFERES NOT, SIRE, IT WILL OCCUR SOME TWELVE NIGHTS FROM THE ONE JUST PAST.


THERE IS YOUR ANSWER, WHITE DOG.
NOW, TAKE THEM AWAY TO THE PITS BENEATH THE CITY!
WHO DO YOU THINK DUG THESE DUNGEON CELLS, FATHER? THE ZEMBABWANS?
OLD STORIES SAY IT WAS THE MYSTERIOUS SERPENT-FOLK OF PREHUMAN TIMES, CONN.
AS YOUR TUTORS HAVE NO DOUBT TOLD YOU, IT'S SAID THE MAN-LEGEND KING KULL SMASHED THEIR KIND IN VALUSIA, IN HIS DAY.
INSIDE, LAD! THEY'D BE ONLY TOO HAPPY FOR A CHANCE TO CARVE US.
I'M NOT AFRAID OF THEM!
PERHAPS NOT, BUT THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND OUR WORDS, I'M SURE...
SO MAYBE IT'S BEST THEY THINK THEY HAVE US COWED.
THERE'S NO WINDOW, FATHER.
DO YOU HOPE TO FIND A SECRET PASSAGE, PERHAPS, THAT THE ZEMBABWANS DON'T KNOW ABOUT?
IF IT WAS SERPENT-MEN OF OLD WHO RAISED OLD ZEMBABWEI--OR AT LEAST LAID THESE FOUNDATIONS ON WHICH THE PRESENT CITY IS BUILT--THERE MIGHT BE MUCH THEY WOULDN'T KNOW.
I'VE SEEN SUCH WORK BEFORE-- ONCE IN A RUINED CASTLE ON THE GRASSY PLAINS OF KUSH, AND AGAIN, YEARS LATER, ON A NAMELESS ISLE IN THE WESTERN OCEAN, WHEN I WAS A BUCCANEER.*
BUT, IF THERE'S A WAY OUT OF HERE, I CAN'T FIND IT.
*IN CONAN THE BARBARIAN #105 AND SAVAGE SWORD #40, RESPECTIVELY. --ROY.

THE WALLS SEEM SOLID--AS DO THESE BARS, THOUGH GREEN WITH AGE.
DO YOU SUPPOSE--THEY'LL FEED US?
I MEAN...NOT THAT I'M THAT HUNGRY OR THIRSTY, BUT...
THERE'S NO SHAME IN ADMITTING HUNGER, LAD...OR FEAR, IF YOU FEEL IT.
BUT I IMAGINE THEY'LL FEED US EVENTUALLY.
THEY MEAN TO SACRIFICE US TO SET, DON'T THEY?
YES... BUT REMEMBER, HALF THE ARMY OF AQUILONIA IS ON ITS WAY HERE AT THIS VERY MOMENT.
I DOUBT NOT THAT PALLANTIDES IS PUSHING HIS MEN THROUGH THE JUNGLE AT A PACE THAT WOULD SLAY LESS STURDY SOULS.
THE NIGHT OF THE RED MOON IS NEARLY A FORTNIGHT AWAY, AND MUCH MAY HAPPEN BEFORE THEN.
AYE, THEY MEAN TO SACRIFICE US--BUT IT'S NOT UP TO THEM, DAMN THEIR HIDES--
THEN, TO WHOM-?
THE GODS, BOY--OR ELSE THAT SHADOWY FATE THE PHILOSOPHERS ALWAYS YAMMER ABOUT.
AS FOR ME...I DOZED POORLY IN THE CLAWS OF THAT WYVERN-MONSTER, AND I COULD DO WITH A BIT OF REST.
I SUPPOSE... I COULD, TOO...
...NOW THAT I...
...THINK ABOUT IT...

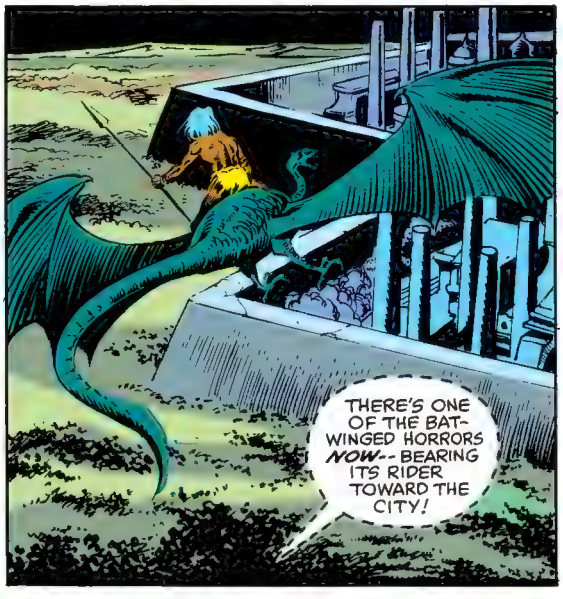

SOME TIME LATER, A SOUND AROUSES THE HUGE CIMMERIAN FROM HIS EXHAUSTED SLUMBERS...
;UNNNHHHNN--!;
INSTANTLY, HE COMES TO FULL ALERTNESS, LIKE A JUNGLE BEAST.
WHO'S GROANING, THERE?
SPEAK UP, DAMN YOU, SO I CAN TELL WHERE YOU--
;UHHHNN--; OVER-- HERE--
FATHER-- WHO--?
SOMEONE FROM A DARK CELL ACROSS THE CORRIDOR.
NOW I SEE HIM!
WHO ARE YOU? ARE YOU WELL ENOUGH TO TALK?
AYE...THOUGH EVERY BREATH... CAUSES ME PAIN...
YOUR VOICE-- IT'S LIKE--
AYE-- LIKE THAT OF NENAUNIR-- AND WELL SHOULD IT BE.
FOR, THIS DYING WRETCH... IS MBEGA... HIS TWIN... AND ONCE KING IN ZEMBABWEI...!
IF YOU SPEAK THE TRUTH, THEN THIS IS INDEED A ROYAL DUNGEON--
FOR, I AM CONAN, KING OF AQUILONIA, TO THE NORTH.
BUT, HOW DID YOU END UP IN HERE, IF YOU'RE--
FOR MANY YEARS... SINCE A PAIR OF TWINS... TAMED THE FLYING ONES, IN THE DIM PAST...
...IT HAS BEEN DECREED... THAT ZEMBABWEI MUST BE RULED... BY PAIRS OF TWINS.
WHEN ONE OF THE PAIR... WOULD DIE... THE OTHER WOULD SLAY HIMSELF... OR ELSE BE SLAIN.
AND THEN THE PRIESTS CHOSE NEW TWIN BOYS, I'LL WAGER.
YOU KNOW WELL... THE POWER OF PRIESTS, THEN.
AYE....AND ALL WENT WELL WITH OUR YOUNG NATION... WHICH HAD SETTLED HERE...


"...UNTIL THE REIGN SHARED BY NENAUNIR AND MBEGA.
"MY BROTHER FELL IN... WITH A CULT OF DEVIL-WORSHIPPERS... WHOSE ANCIENT CULT DATES BACK TO ACHERON, KINGDOM OF SHADOWS.
"THE DEMON-GOD DAMBALLAH--OR SET, AS THE STYGIANS CALL HIM--PROMISED GREATNESS TO NENAUNIR IF HE AND HIS FOLLOWERS WOULD WORSHIP HIM.
"MY TWIN BROTHER'S CONVERSION...TORE THE PEOPLE INTO FACTIONS... AND, RATHER THAN SEE THE KINGDOM RENT ASUNDER AND DROWNED IN BLOOD...
"...I SURRENDERED MY SCEPTRE... TO NENAUNIR.
"BUT, THIS DID NOT SATISFY HIM...AND HE SET ABOUT TO SLAY ALL WHO WOULD NOT BOW TO DAMBALLAH.
"AND SO, WE OTHERS WERE FORCED AT LAST TO REVOLT... BUT BY THEN WE LACKED THE POWER TO OPPOSE HIM...
HE DARES NOT SLAY ME...SO HE IMPRISONED ME...FOR SUCH LITTLE LIFE AS I HAVE LEFT...!
YET, YOUR FLOGGING--IT SEEMS RECENT.
WHEN LAST MY BROTHER PARADED ME BEFORE THE PEOPLE...I SPAT IN HIS FACE.
YOU STILL HAVE MANY FOLLOWERS IN THE CITY, THEN?
AYE...BUT THEY TOO WILL DIE... ERE LONG...!

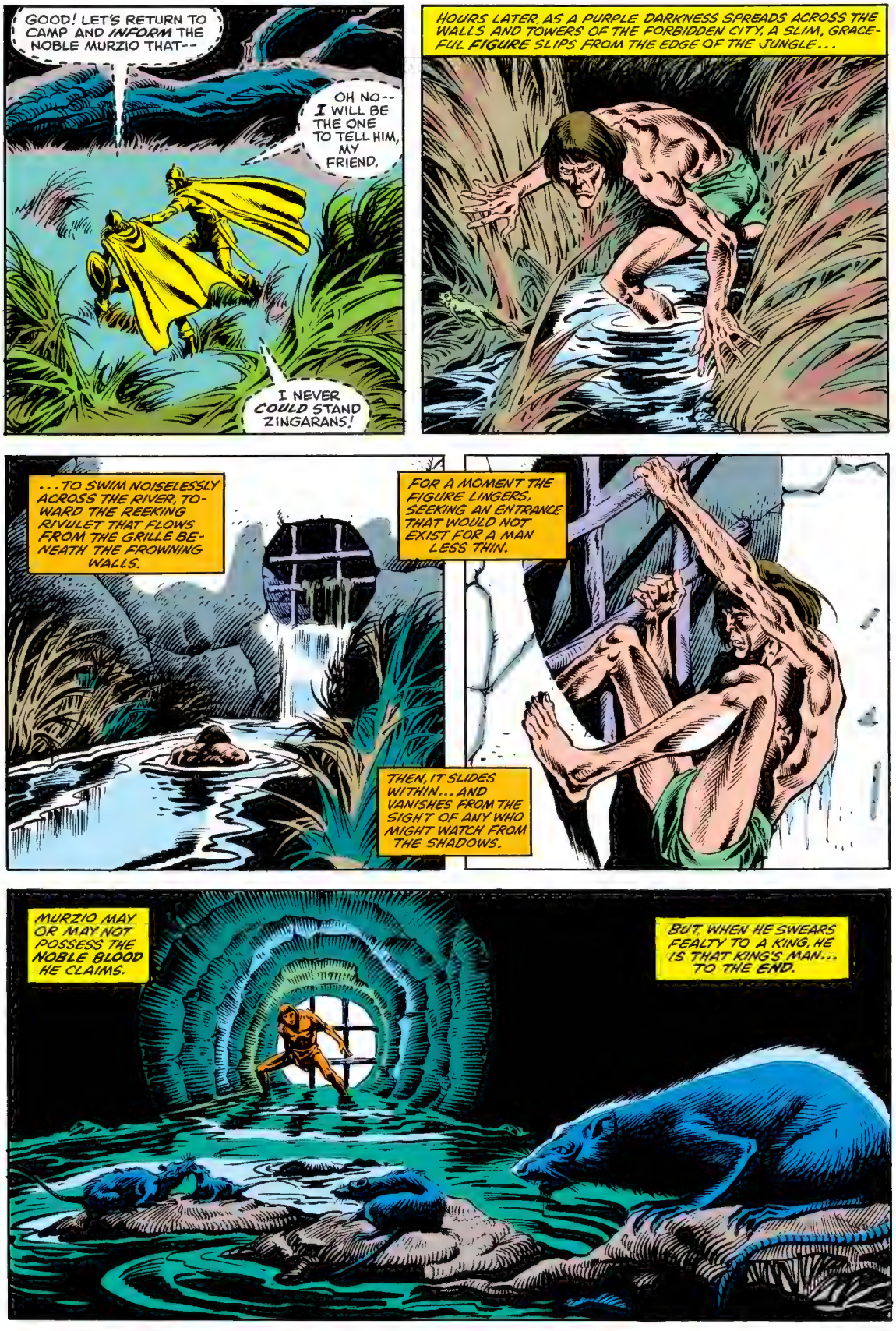
Ten days Later:
THE GODS PRESERVE US, PALLANTIDES-- HOW MUCH *FURTHER* TILL WE REACH THE FORBIDDEN CITY?
THE STENCH OF *ROTTING VEGETATION* WAS NEARLY--
I'D *LOWER* MY VOICE IF I WERE YOU, COUNT--

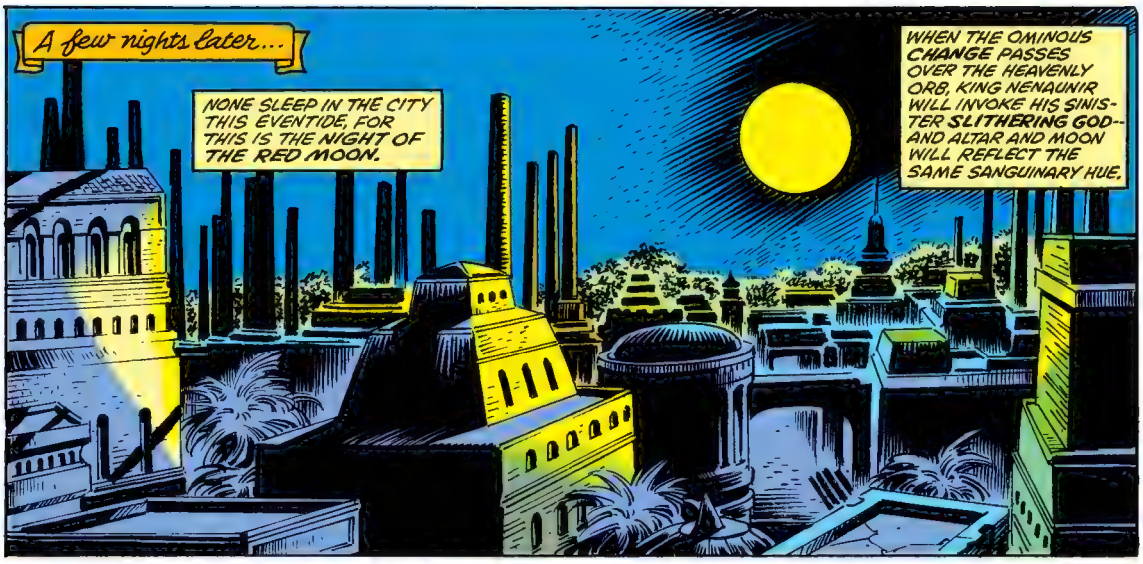
--UNLESS YOU WANT TO *WAKE UP* WHATEVER DEVILS DOUBTLESS SLUMBER BEYOND THOSE GREAT WALLS.
MITRA!

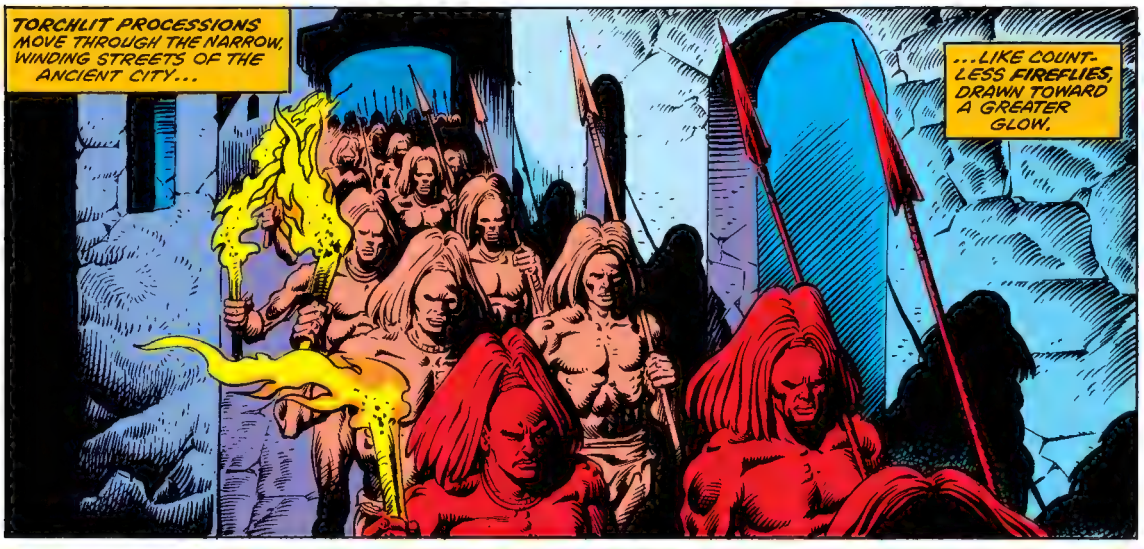
SENTRIES ON THE WALLS-- GUARDPOSTS ON THE TOWERS-- THIS WILL BE A *HARD* NUT TO CRACK.
AYE. IT WOULD TAKE *MONTHS OF SIEGE* TO FORCE AN ENTRY, AND BY THEN--
DOWN, TROCERO!--


THERE'S ONE OF THE BAT-WINGED HORRORS *NOW*-- BEARING ITS RIDER TOWARD THE CITY!

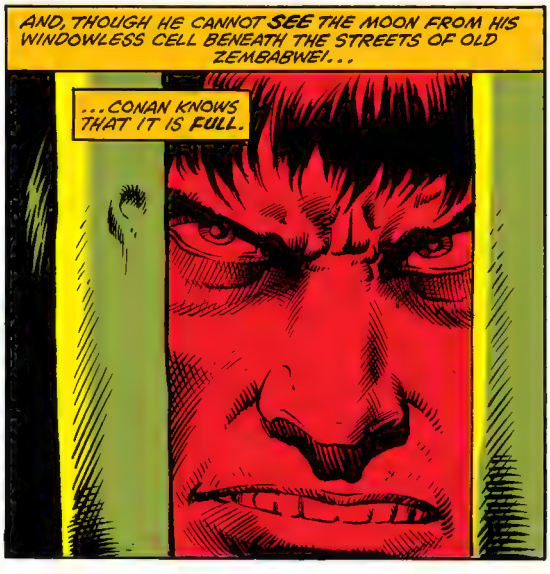
SO THAT'S THE SECRET OF THE TOPLESS TOWERS!
THAT IS WHERE THE WYVERNS GO TO ROOST, LIKE BATS IN A CAVE.
TO MOLOCH'S FLAMES WITH THE DEVILS!
WE HAVE A KING AND A PRINCE TO RESCUE!
I WONDER-- IF THEY'RE STILL ALIVE!?
THAT WE'LL FIND OUT ONCE WE'RE WITHIN THOSE WALLS.
YOU'VE HAD MORE EXPERIENCE WITH SIEGES THAN I, GENERAL-- BUT TO ME, THOSE WALLS LOOK IMPREGNABLE.
TO AN ARMY, YES-- BUT NOT TO A LONE MAN.
YOU HAVE A PLAN, THEN?
AYE, DO YOU RECALL THE ZINGARAN NOBLE, MURZIO, WHO RIDES WITH US?
THAT SLY LITTLE TURNCOAT? WHAT OF HIM?
A WEASEL, I AGREE-- AND I'VE LONG SUSPECTED HE WAS ACTUALLY SPAWNED IN THE GUTTERS OF KORDAVA...
STILL, CONAN HAD HIS FRIEND NINUS... YOU KNOW, THAT THIEF-TURNED-PRIEST-OF-MITRA...* TEACH HIM MANY TRICKS OF HIS OLD TRADE.
AND MURZIO, IT'S SAID, PROVED AN APT PUPIL.
WHAT HAS THIS TO DO WITH GETTING INTO OLD ZEMBABWEI?
THERE'S ONE UN-GUARDED GATE TO EVERY GREAT CITY, COUNT--
*SAVAGE SWORD #40. --R.T.
--ITS SEWERS!
AND, IF THERE BE ONE MAN IN OUR ARMY WHO CAN WORM HIS WAY THROUGH YONDER GRILLE, IT'S MURZIO OF ZINGARA...!


GOOD! LET'S RETURN TO CAMP AND INFORM THE NOBLE MURZIO THAT--
OH NO-- I WILL BE THE ONE TO TELL HIM, MY FRIEND.
I NEVER COULD STAND ZINGARANS!
HOURS LATER, AS A PURPLE DARKNESS SPREADS ACROSS THE WALLS AND TOWERS OF THE FORBIDDEN CITY, A SLIM, GRACEFUL FIGURE SLIPS FROM THE EDGE OF THE JUNGLE...
...TO SWIM NOISELESSLY ACROSS THE RIVER, TOWARD THE REEKING RIVULET THAT FLOWS FROM THE GRILLE BENEATH THE FROWNING WALLS.
FOR A MOMENT THE FIGURE LINGERS, SEEKING AN ENTRANCE THAT WOULD NOT EXIST FOR A MAN LESS THIN.
THEN, IT SLIDES WITHIN... AND VANISHES FROM THE SIGHT OF ANY WHO MIGHT WATCH FROM THE SHADOWS.
MURZIO MAY OR MAY NOT POSSESS THE NOBLE BLOOD HE CLAIMS.
BUT, WHEN HE SWEARS FEALTY TO A KING, HE IS THAT KING'S MAN... TO THE END.


A few nights later...
NONE SLEEP IN THE CITY THIS EVENTIDE, FOR THIS IS THE NIGHT OF THE RED MOON.
WHEN THE OMINOUS CHANGE PASSES OVER THE HEAVENLY ORB, KING NENAUNIR WILL INVOKE HIS SINISTER SLITHERING GOD--AND ALTAR AND MOON WILL REFLECT THE SAME SANGUINARY HUE.

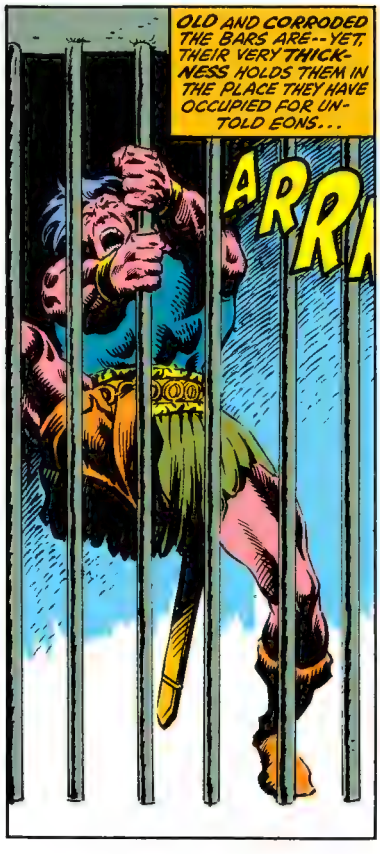

TORCHLIT PROCESSIONS MOVE THROUGH THE NARROW, WINDING STREETS OF THE ANCIENT CITY...
...LIKE COUNTLESS FIREFLIES, DRAWN TOWARD A GREATER GLOW.

THE THUD OF DRUMS THROBS THROUGH THE HOT, BLACK AIR...
...AND WEIRD CHANTS ARISE, IN TONGUES NO WHITE OR YELLOW MAN KNOWS.

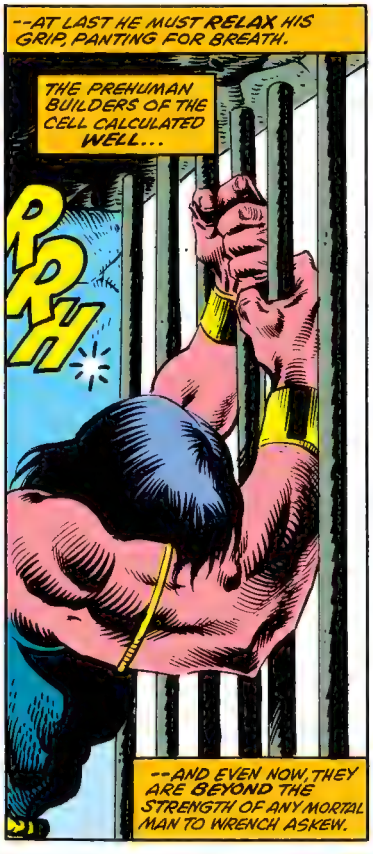

AND, THOUGH HE CANNOT SEE THE MOON FROM HIS WINDOWLESS CELL BENEATH THE STREETS OF OLD ZEMBABWEI...
...CONAN KNOWS THAT IT IS FULL.

HE AND YOUNG CONN DO NOT SPEAK OF THE DOOM TO COME-- FOR THE CIMMERIAN HAS RAISED HIS SON NOT TO WASTE WORDS.
BETTER FAR, RATHER, TO TEST ONCE MORE ONE'S STRENGTH ON THE BARS OF THE PRIMEVAL CELL--

--TO STRAIN, ONCE MORE, WITH PALMS LONG SINCE RUBBED RAW WITH TRYING--
--WITH SINEWS THAT, IF THEY ARE NOT QUITE AS POWERFUL AS ONCE THEY WERE, ARE STILL THE EQUAL OF ANY TWO MEN HE IS EVER LIKE TO MEET.

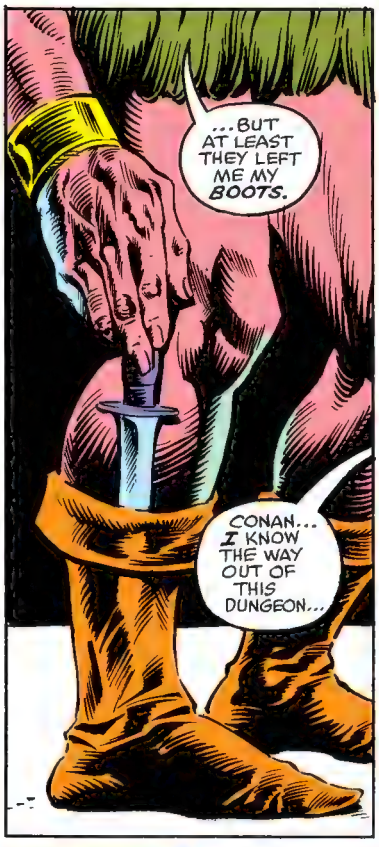

OLD AND CORRODED THE BARS ARE--YET, THEIR VERY THICKNESS HOLDS THEM IN THE PLACE THEY HAVE OCCUPIED FOR UNTOLD EONS...
ARRR

AND, THOUGH HIS EARS RING--THOUGH HIS FACE BE CRIMSON WITH THE SUPERHUMAN EFFORT--
RRRR


--AT LAST HE MUST RELAX HIS GRIP, PANTING FOR BREATH.
THE PREHUMAN BUILDERS OF THE CELL CALCULATED WELL...
RRH
--AND EVEN NOW, THEY ARE BEYOND THE STRENGTH OF ANY MORTAL MAN TO WRENCH ASKEW.

AT THAT INSTANT--WHEN DESPAIR STANDS POISED TO TRIUMPH OVER COURAGE--
EH? WHO'S THERE?
PERHAPS IN THE LIGHT YOU'LL KNOW ME, MY LIEGE.
MURZIO! IS IT YOU--OR DO I DREAM?
HOW IN CROM'S NAME DID YOU GET IN HERE, REEKING LIKE A SEWER?
AND WHAT OF MY HOST? ARE THEY CAMPED NEARBY?
A MAN STINKS OF THE SEWER WHEN HE HAS CRAWLED THROUGH ONE, SIRE.
YOUR ARMY IS OUTSIDE THE CITY'S SOUTHERN GATE... BUT ALAS, THE WAY TO THE STREET ABOVE IS MERE TUBES, TOO NARROW EVEN FOR ME TO ENTER.
I FOLLOWED THIS SYSTEM OF PASSAGES AND FOUND YOU, MILORD. BUT I HAVE FAILED OF MY MISSION.
I CAN-NOT GET TO THE GATES, TO OPEN THEM FOR THE ARMY OF AQUILONIA.
AT LEAST YOU'RE HERE, MAN--AND ALL'S NOT LOST YET!
HAVE YOU A PICK-LOCK SUCH AS NINUS TAUGHT YOU TO MAKE?
ONCE OUT OF THIS CAGE, WE WOULD AT LEAST HAVE A FIGHTING CHANCE.
A PICK-LOCK? AYE...
...BUT, CONFOUND IT, FATHER NINUS HIM-SELF COULD NOT SPRING THIS LOCK, SIRE.
I THINK IT ACCURSED.
THAT MAY WELL BE TRUE, MURZIO; I'D NOT PUT IT PAST THAT STYGIAN JACKAL TO HAVE ENCHANTED THE LOCK OF MY CELL!

BUT, THEN WHAT CAN--?
TRY THE LOCK ON THE CELL ACROSS THE WAY!
THE PRISONER THEREIN IS... A FRIEND, OF SORTS.
THE CHAINED MBEGA WATCHES IN IMPASSIVE SILENCE AS THE ZINGARAN SETS TO WORK ON THE LOCK OF HIS CELL... AND, ERE LONG...
IT'S OPEN, SIRE!
THANK CROM! NOW, RELEASE MBEGA-- HURRY, MAN!
UNNNHHNN--!
I'M-- SORRY FOR HOW MUCH THIS MUST HURT ONE WHO'S BEEN TORTURED AS YOU HAVE BEEN--
BUT, AT LEAST YOU'RE FREE, AND--MITRA, BUT YOU'RE A BIG ONE!
I'LL BE ABLE-- TO STAND ON MY OWN-- IN A MOMENT.
NOT TO BE DISRESPECTFUL-- BUT I'LL BE GLAD FOR THAT.
WELL DONE! YOU ZEMBABWANS BUILT A STOUT CELL DOOR-- BUT NO MATTER.
WHAT CANNOT BE CURED MUST BE ENDURED.
BUT... YOU FACE DEATH...
NOT FOR THE FIRST TIME, MY FRIEND.
WHAT MORE CAN I DO, MY LIEGE?
FIRST, SLIP ME YOUR PONIARD.
THE ZEMBABWANS HAVE STRIPPED ME NIGH NAKED...


...BUT AT LEAST THEY LEFT ME MY BOOTS.
CONAN... I KNOW THE WAY OUT OF THIS DUNGEON...

GOOD! HELP HIM, ZINGARAN.
MBEGA, THIS IS YOUR LAST CHANCE! IF YOUR FOLLOWERS CAN RISE BEFORE THE HOUR OF SACRIFICE AND OPEN THE SOUTH GATE TO MY ARMY, WE MAY YET OUTLIVE THE DAWN!
I SHALL DO... WHAT I CAN, MY NORTHERN FRIEND...!

AND NOW, AT LAST, FATHER SPEAKS TO SON...
BE OF GOOD CHEER, CONN.
ONE FRIEND WITHIN THE WALLS IS WORTH TEN THOUSAND LOCKED OUTSIDE THEM.
REMEMBER THAT ALWAYS.
I WILL, SIRE... ALWAYS.

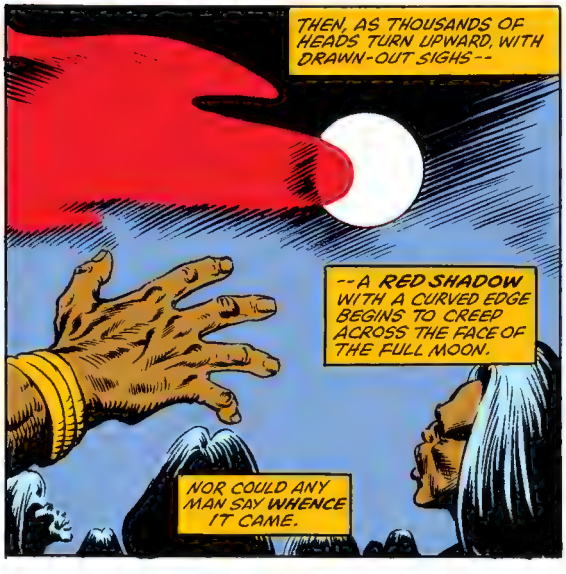
SOON, THE TWO ROYAL CAPTIVES ARE ESCORTED BOUND FROM THE PITS BY A PARTY OF BLACK WARRIORS... AND OUT INTO THE GREAT PLAZA BETWEEN PALACE AND TEMPLE.
ALREADY THE FULL MOON RIDES HIGH IN THE SKY, ITS BRILLIANT LIGHT RENDERING THE STARS FEW AND WAN.

BUT NEITHER MOON NOR STARS NOR EVEN BLINDING SUN WILL EVER SHINE SO BRIGHTLY, IN CONAN'S STEEL-BLUE EYES, AS DOES HIS OWN OFFSPRING IN THIS TIME OF TRIAL.
WERE THE BOY NOT HIS OWN, NOR EVEN A PRINCE, THE CIMMERIAN CAN THINK OF NONE HE WOULD STAND BESIDE MORE PROUDLY.
NOW, KING AND HEIR STAND BEFORE THE GLYPH-CARVED TEMPLE OF DAMBALLAH...

...WHERE A STRANGE ALTAR OF BLACK MARBLE WAITS, BEFORE A SINISTER SERPENT-IDOL CARVED OF NIGHT-DARK BASALT, WITH GREAT RUBIES FOR EYES.
SET--OR DAMBALLAH, AS THE ZEMBABWANS CALL THEIR SO-CALLED "SLITHERING GOD."
CROM...!

SWIFTLY, BOTH CAPTIVES ARE CHAINED AT THE BOTTOM OF THE BOWL-ALTAR...

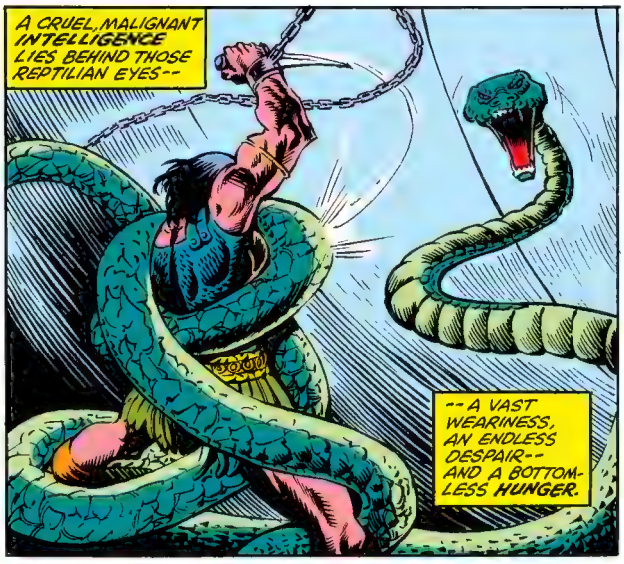
...WHILE, ACROSS THE SQUARE, THE WASTED FIGURE OF THOTH-AMON STANDS BESIDE KING NENAUNIR.
THE SILENCE LENGTHENS, BROKEN ONLY BY THE MOAN OF THE NIGHT WIND OF THE NEARBY JUNGLE.


THEN, AS THOUSANDS OF HEADS TURN UPWARD, WITH DRAWN-OUT SIGHS--
--A RED SHADOW WITH A CURVED EDGE BEGINS TO CREEP ACROSS THE FACE OF THE FULL MOON.
NOR COULD ANY MAN SAY WHENCE IT CAME.

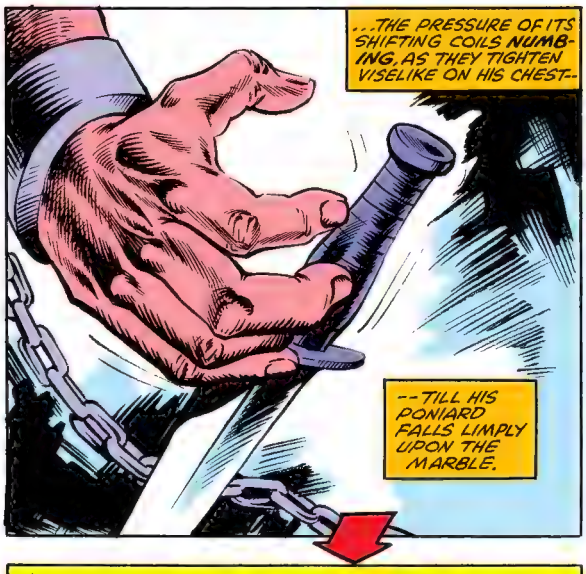
FATHER--!
YES, LAD--I KNOW! IT'S TIME TO ACT.
THESE CHAINS--AND THE WRIST-CUFFS--ARE MADE OF NEW BRONZE, THAT NO MAN'S SINEWS COULD BREAK--

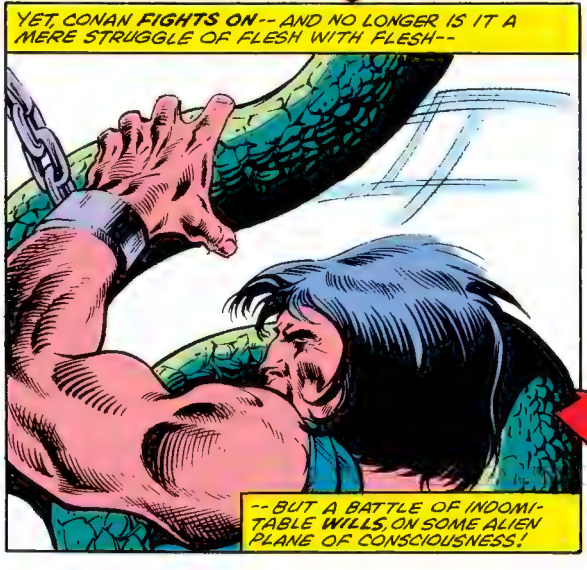
BUT, THE RING SET IN THE MARBLE IS-- UNNNNH!-- WEAK FROM CENTURIES OF RUST--
--LIKE THE BARS-- OF OUR CELL--
--AND NOWHERE NEAR AS THICK!
HAH!
NOW-- GOT TO GET THE OTHER ARM FREE-- BEFORE THOSE DOGS LOOK DOWN-- AND SEE US!
:UNNNFFH!:
AT ANY SECOND, THE WARRIOR-KING HAS EXPECTED TO FEEL A JAVELIN STRIKE HIS BROAD BACK...
YET NOW, AS HE TURNS HIS EYES FOR AN INSTANT TOWARD THE ZEMBABWANS NEARBY...
...HE SEES THAT THEY ARE MERELY WATCHING HIM FREE HIMSELF, WITH STOLIDLY INDIFFERENT FACES.
AND EVEN AS HE LOOKS, THE DRUMMING CHANGES ITS BEAT...
...AND A BOOMING CHANT ARISES FROM THE MASSED THOUSANDS.
DON'T WASTE TIME FREEING ME, FATHER! YOU MUST--
I MUST FREE MY SON-- OR I'M NO MAN, LIVE OR DIE!
SIRE--THAT CHILL-- LIKE AN ICY WIND ON US! WHAT--?
I SHOULD HAVE GUESSED!
THOSE STEAMY VAPORS-- CONDENSING BENEATH THE MOON-- THEY'RE TAKING ON FORM-- SUBSTANCE--

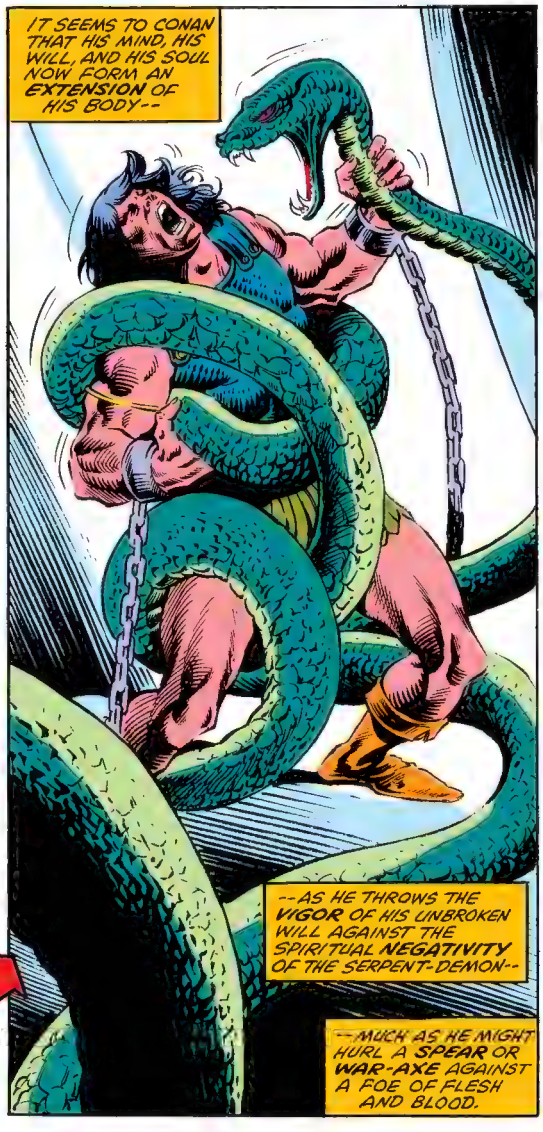
DAMBALLAH HIMSELF IS MATERIALIZING ON THIS EARTHLY PLANE-- TO CRUSH US TO A PULP!
THERE! YOU'RE FREE, CONN! NOW TO--
FATHER!
RUN, BOY! THE GATES!
SAVE YOURSELF-- AND TRY TO LET THE ARMY IN!
IF THE FATHER OF ALL EVIL IS GOING TO FEED ON MY SOUL--
--HE'LL FIND MY BLADE AS COLD AS HIS COILS!
YET, THOUGH CONAN DRIVES THE DAGGER DEEP INTO THE SERPENT'S WRITHING SCALES, HIS BLOWS DO NOT SEEM TO HURT THE APPARITION SLOWLY SOLIDIFYING ABOUT HIM...
...AS DAMBALLAH'S WEDGE-SHAPED HEAD SWAYS AGAINST THE BURNING MOON, WHILE EYES OF SCARLET FLAME LOCK INTO HIS OWN!

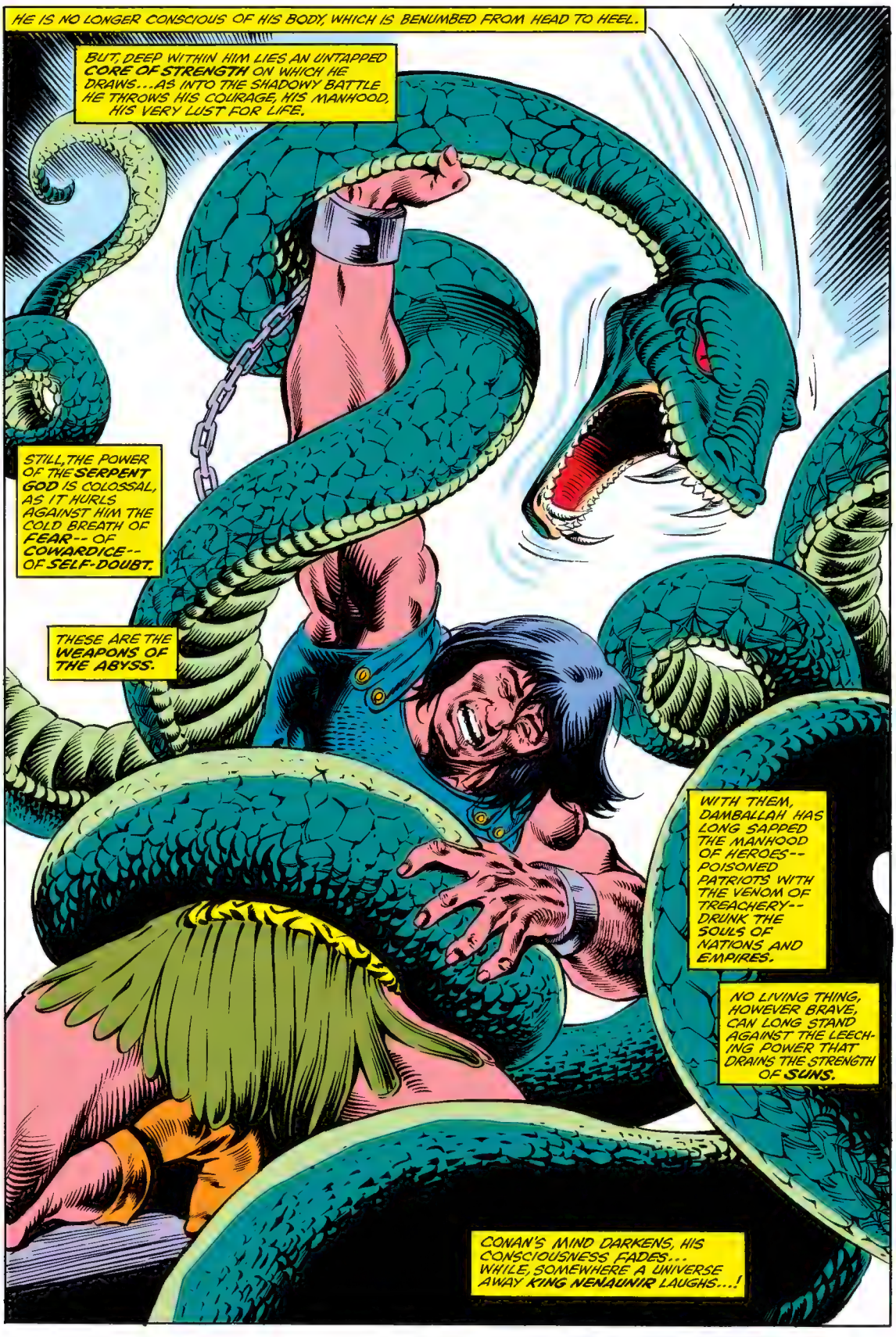

A CRUEL, MALIGNANT INTELLIGENCE LIES BEHIND THOSE REPTILIAN EYES--
--A VAST WEARINESS, AN ENDLESS DESPAIR-- AND A BOTTOMLESS HUNGER.

CONAN'S SOUL QUAILS AS HE STARES INTO THE EYES OF A DEMON THAT, FOR A MILLION YEARS, HAS STRIVEN TO TRAMPLE HIS RACE BACK INTO THE MUD FROM WHICH IT HAS SLOWLY, PAINFULLY EMERGED.
THE COLD IS BONE-DEEP NOW... THE WEIGHT OF THE SERPENT'S BODY CRUSHING...
=UNNHH--!=

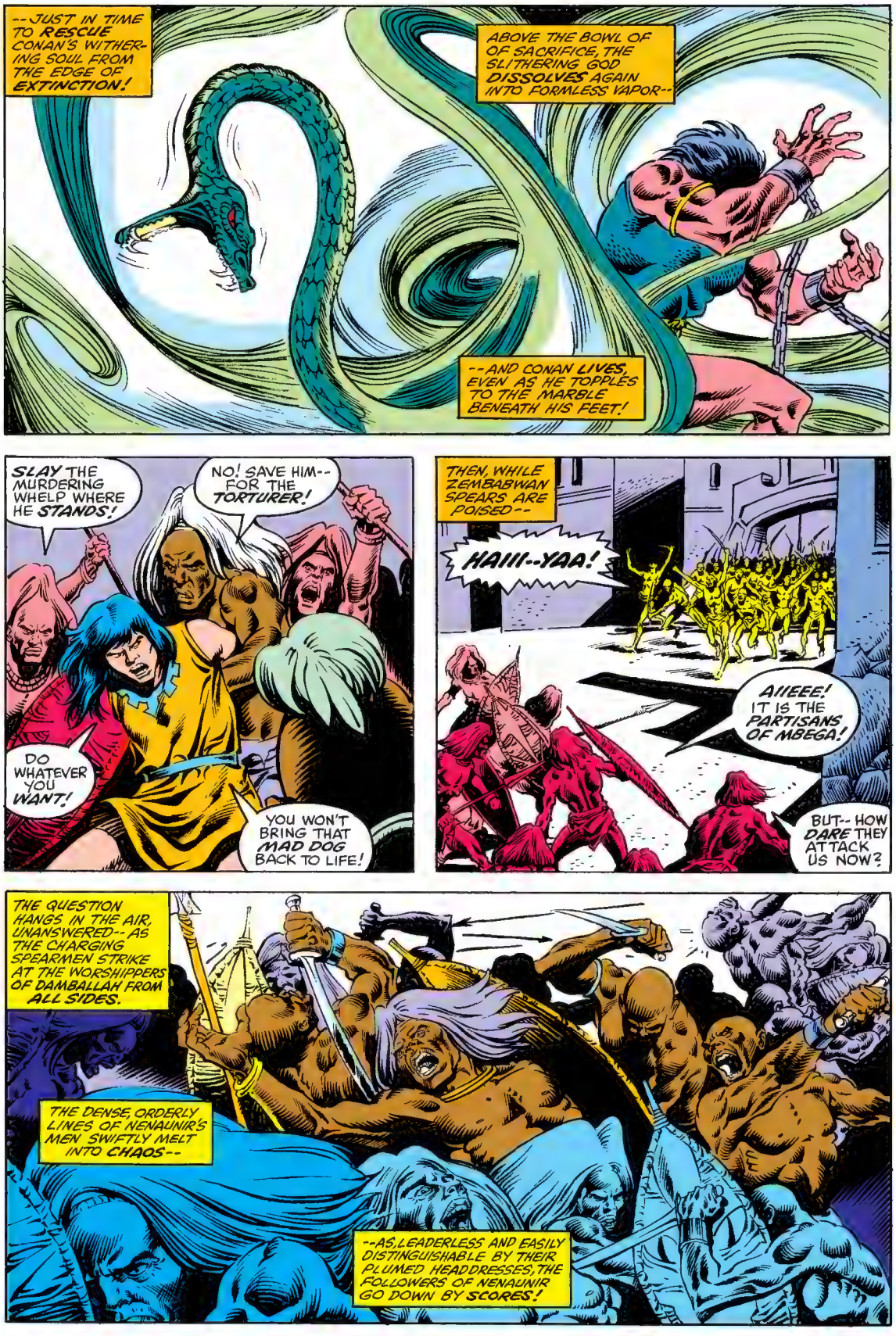

...THE PRESSURE OF ITS SHIFTING COILS NUMBING, AS THEY TIGHTEN VISELIKE ON HIS CHEST--
--TILL HIS PONIARD FALLS LIMPLY UPON THE MARBLE.

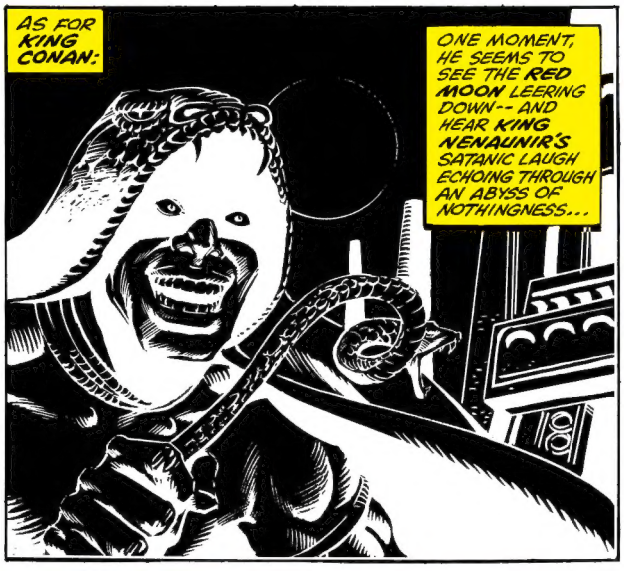

YET, CONAN FIGHTS ON-- AND NO LONGER IS IT A MERE STRUGGLE OF FLESH WITH FLESH--
--BUT A BATTLE OF INDOMITABLE WILLS, ON SOME ALIEN PLANE OF CONSCIOUSNESS!


IT SEEMS TO CONAN THAT HIS MIND, HIS WILL, AND HIS SOUL NOW FORM AN EXTENSION OF HIS BODY--
--AS HE THROWS THE VIGOR OF HIS UNBROKEN WILL AGAINST THE SPIRITUAL NEGATIVITY OF THE SERPENT-DEMON--
--MUCH AS HE MIGHT HURL A SPEAR OR WAR-AXE AGAINST A FOE OF FLESH AND BLOOD.

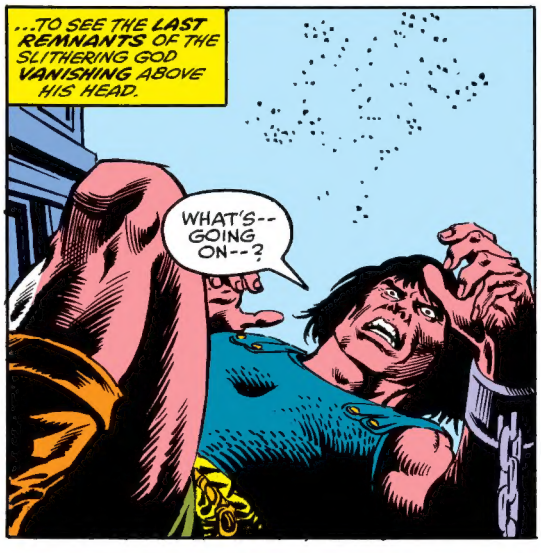

HE IS NO LONGER CONSCIOUS OF HIS BODY, WHICH IS BENUMBED FROM HEAD TO HEEL.
BUT, DEEP WITHIN HIM LIES AN UNTAPPED CORE OF STRENGTH ON WHICH HE DRAWS...AS INTO THE SHADOWY BATTLE HE THROWS HIS COURAGE, HIS MANHOOD, HIS VERY LUST FOR LIFE.
STILL, THE POWER OF THE SERPENT GOD IS COLOSSAL, AS IT HURLS AGAINST HIM THE COLD BREATH OF FEAR-- OF COWARDICE-- OF SELF-DOUBT.
THESE ARE THE WEAPONS OF THE ABYSS.
WITH THEM, DAMBALLAH HAS LONG SAPPED THE MANHOOD OF HEROES-- POISONED PATRIOTS WITH THE VENOM OF TREACHERY-- DRUNK THE SOULS OF NATIONS AND EMPIRES.
NO LIVING THING, HOWEVER BRAVE, CAN LONG STAND AGAINST THE LEECHING POWER THAT DRAINS THE STRENGTH OF SUNS.
CONAN'S MIND DARKENS, HIS CONSCIOUSNESS FADES... WHILE, SOMEWHERE A UNIVERSE AWAY KING NENAUNIR LAUGHS...!

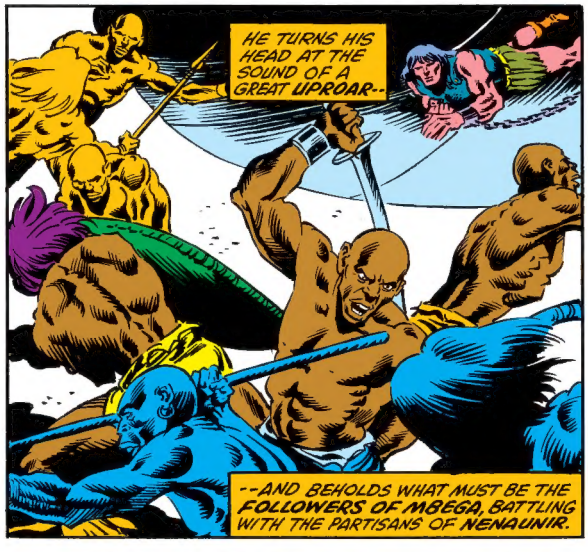
AND THAT GROSS, INHUMAN LAUGHTER STIRS INTO ACTION ONE WHO HAS, TILL NOW, STOOD NUMB WITH SHOCK:
PRINCE CONN, WHO HAS NOT FLED AS ORDERED BY HIS FATHER--
--BUT WHO NOW RETRIEVES THE DAGGER FALLEN FROM HIS MIGHTY SIRE'S HAND--
--AND LOOKS ABOUT FOR A PLACE TO SHEATHE IT:
HIS QUICK MIND TELLS HIM THAT AGAINST THE COILS OF DAMBALLAH IT WILL BE TOO LITTLE... AND FAR TOO LATE.
BUT, THERE IS ANOTHER WHO CAN BE REACHED-- ONE WHO IS MORTAL, FOR ALL HIS SORCEROUS POWER:
KING NENAUNIR!
WEAPON IN HAND, CONN FLINGS HIMSELF TOWARD WHERE THE ZEMBABWAN STANDS, EYES ABLAZE WITH BLOOD-LUST AND TRIUMPH.
ONLY THOTH-AMON STANDS CLOSE ENOUGH PERHAPS TO PREVENT HIM--
--BUT THE STYGIAN STAYS HIS HAND AN INSTANT, TORN 'TWIXT JEALOUSY AND PRUDENCE--
--AND THAT IS LONG ENOUGH!
WHAT--?
AAAHAAAAAAA
AS THE DAGGER PIERCES NENAUNIR'S HEART, THE SPELL THAT SUSTAINS DAMBALLAH ON THE EARTHLY PLANE IS BROKEN--


--JUST IN TIME TO RESCUE CONAN'S WITHERING SOUL FROM THE EDGE OF EXTINCTION!
ABOVE THE BOWL OF OF SACRIFICE, THE SLITHERING GOD DISSOLVES AGAIN INTO FORMLESS VAPOR--
--AND CONAN LIVES, EVEN AS HE TOPPLES TO THE MARBLE BENEATH HIS FEET!
SLAY THE MURDERING WHELP WHERE HE STANDS!
NO! SAVE HIM-- FOR THE TORTURER!
DO WHATEVER YOU WANT!
YOU WON'T BRING THAT MAD DOG BACK TO LIFE!
THEN, WHILE ZEMBABWAN SPEARS ARE POISED--
HAIII--YAA!
AIIEEE! IT IS THE PARTISANS OF MBEGA!
BUT-- HOW DARE THEY ATTACK US NOW?
THE QUESTION HANGS IN THE AIR, UNANSWERED-- AS THE CHARGING SPEARMEN STRIKE AT THE WORSHIPPERS OF DAMBALLAH FROM ALL SIDES.
THE DENSE, ORDERLY LINES OF NENAUNIR'S MEN SWIFTLY MELT INTO CHAOS--
--AS, LEADERLESS AND EASILY DISTINGUISHABLE BY THEIR PLUMED HEADDRESSES, THE FOLLOWERS OF NENAUNIR GO DOWN BY SCORES!

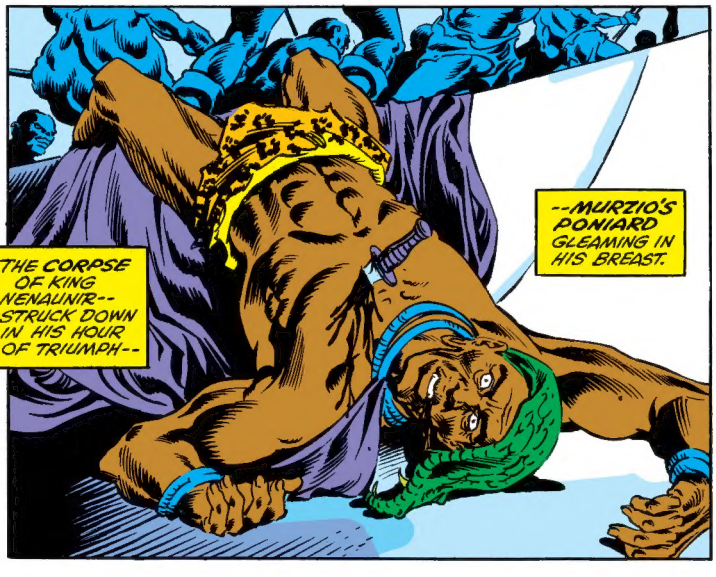

AS FOR KING CONAN:
ONE MOMENT, HE SEEMS TO SEE THE RED MOON LEERING DOWN-- AND HEAR KING NENAUNIR'S SATANIC LAUGH ECHOING THROUGH AN ABYSS OF NOTHINGNESS...

THE NEXT, THE DEATHLY COLD THAT NUMBS HIS BODY LESSENS...THE CRUSHING PRESSURE LIGHTENS...
...AND HE OPENS WEARY EYES...


...TO SEE THE LAST REMNANTS OF THE SLITHERING GOD VANISHING ABOVE HIS HEAD.
WHAT'S-- GOING ON--?


HE TURNS HIS HEAD AT THE SOUND OF A GREAT UPROAR--
--AND BEHOLDS WHAT MUST BE THE FOLLOWERS OF MBEGA, BATTLING WITH THE PARTISANS OF NENAUNIR.

NENAUNIR! EVEN AS HE STRUGGLES DIZZILY TO RISE, VENGEFUL EYES ALREADY SEEK OUT THAT VILE SERVANT OF DAMBALLAH.
THEN, ONLY A FEW PACES FROM THE EDGE OF THE MARBLE BOWL, HE BEHOLDS:
MANTLE OF MITRA!


THE CORPSE OF KING NENAUNIR-- STRUCK DOWN IN HIS HOUR OF TRIUMPH--
--MURZIO'S PONIARD GLEAMING IN HIS BREAST.

HIS FULL STRENGTH NOT YET RETURNED, HE IS FORCING HIMSELF ERECT, TO JOIN THE BLOODY FRAY--
--WHEN HIS OWN AQUILONIANS ARRIVE, TO TIP THE TOPPLING SCALES OF BATTLE.
FOR KING CONAN-- AND YOUNG PRINCE CONN!
MOMENTS LATER, THE SQUARE RESOUNDS WITH THE CLATTER OF DROPPED WEAPONS...
...AS THOSE WHO REMAIN ALIVE OF NENAUNIR'S MEN SURRENDER, SEEING FURTHER STRUGGLES USELESS.
THEN, AS CONAN STANDS ON HALF-NUMB LEGS...
OH, FATHER-- FATHER-- I KILLED NENAUNIR--!
THE SNAKE-GOD WAS GOING TO KILL YOU-- I GRABBED THE KNIFE, AND--
EASY, LAD...
IT'S ALL OVER NOW, AND YOU'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT THE FIRST MAN EVER YOU SLEW... WAS A KING.
BUT, IT APPEARS I WAS WRONG WHEN I SAID TO THOTH-AMON THAT OUR FINAL BATTLE WOULD BE FOUGHT AMONG THE TOPLESS TOWERS...
FOR, THERE HE GOES NOW-- NOR CAN ANY MAN STAY HIS PATH!

THE WYVERN IS BEARING HIM... SOUTH.
SOUTH: WHERE LIES NAUGHT BUT JUNGLE, AND THE EDGE OF THE KNOWN WORLD ITSELF.
THE STYGIAN MAGE IS ALONE NOW, HAVING LOST EVEN THE FAVOR OF HIS MERCILESS GOD.
WHERE ELSE CAN HE GO?
COME, BOY... LET'S FIND PALLANTIDES AND TROCERO... AYE, AND THAT SLY ROGUE MURZIO, WHOM I THINK I'LL MAKE A BARON!
BY DAWN, I'LL HAVE CROWNED MBEGA WITH MY OWN HANDS.
THEN, THE ARMY WILL REST HERE A WHILE, LICKING ITS WOUNDS.
AND THEN, SIRE?
HAH! YOU KNOW WHAT THEN MUST FOLLOW, CONN.
THEN IT'S SOUTH-- SOUTH TO THE WORLD'S EDGE, WHERE ON A NAMELESS BEACH THAT FRONTS AN UNKNOWN SEA, I'LL CLOSE WITH THOTH-AMON FOR THE ULTIMATE BATTLE!
CROM, BUT IT FEELS GOOD TO BE ALIVE!
NEXT: SHADOWS IN THE SKULL!
CIMMERIAN VS. STYGIAN-- TO THE DEATH!

KING CONAN

c/o MARVEL COMICS GROUP
575 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10022

ROY THOMAS
EDITOR
MARK GRUENWALD
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Dear Roy T., John B., and Ernie C.,

This is the first letter I've written to Marvel in some eighteen years of enjoying your comics, the first seven years of my life necessarily being used to learn *how* to read. My wife and I have gradually become Marvel addicts, reading most of your titles faithfully, and especially CONAN THE BARBARIAN, SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN, and now KING CONAN, the stimulus for this letter. If it seems to be a little heavy on the compliments, all three of you are to blame. You just put too much quality in KING CONAN #1 for me *not* to respond.

I was apprehensive that "The Witch of the Mists" would reveal the greying king who was so painful for me to read about in the de Camp and Carter volume. Thank you for keeping him mature, wise, and yet still full of power and stamina. I'll never forget the sadness I felt seeing Willie Mays miss catching a fly ball, not because of lack of desire or talent, but just because of legs that had lost their fleetness. There was nothing I could do for him, but with my thanks to you goes the request that Conan does not lose the vitality that my paunch can only envy. You've captured him in this first story just as I hoped.

Roy, I'd shell out my shekels for a novel by you anyday. Your writing has a flowing realism that adds believability in Conan's hard-to-believe world. And your adeptness at handling the Cimmerian's personality at three different ages in his life is done with care. I guess if all I wrote was, "You care!" it would save a lot of time, but I'm cooking now. Whatever the literary powers-that-be may say, I'll lay odds that your novel would surpass anything written about Conan to date by deCamp, Carter, Nyberg, Offutt, or even Wagner. There are a lot of us non-letter-writers who thank you for the job well done.

Without shorting the unquestionable talent of Barry Smith during his Conan days, I still consider John Buscema to be the premier artist in capturing the intensity of emotion and strength that is the lifeblood of Conan. And he ain't no slouch on the bad guys, either. His demons and sorcerers have made me squirm more than once.

If I may second-guess Robert E. Howard, I think he would be proud of all three of you.

James A. Harrell
Augusta, GA 30912

We'd like to think so ourselves, James — and we're truly proud and happy that KING CONAN #1 brought you out of the cultural closet, so to speak. Incidentally, though there were too many prose hands already in the Conan pie for co-writers Roy Thomas and Gerry Conway to get a chance at a novel starring the Cimmerian swashbuckler, REH literary agent liked the guys' first few chapters well enough to suggest that they turn it into a King Kull novel instead. That required more work than just changing a few names, of course, but they're hard at work on it, and who knows--maybe one of these days...! —R.T.

Dear Editor:

Having just read KING CONAN #1, I thought I'd toss a few random thoughts at you.

(1) This mag is only going to be published quarterly? With Conan's popularity, I thought that we'd see it as a bi-monthly, at least. On the positive side, though, this should ensure that there are no continued stories, since a three-month wait is quite a bit to ask the readers to sit through.

(2) I realize that you'll be adapting some already-written King Conan tales, but I ask you to keep the following in mind when you are working on original material. This mag should feature only stories that could have happened to *King* Conan — *i.e.*, stories that make use of the fact that he is older, a king, etc. Otherwise, it might just as well have been a "regular" Conan epic, and we already get a lot of those, however good they may be.

(3) King Conan does not look, act, or talk like a man who is "pushing sixty years of age," as you say. Sure, he's a remarkable man and maybe he's "young for his age," but his depiction here is unrealistically so. I understand that you didn't give him a beard, etc., so that he'd be instantly recognizable as Conan (thus enhancing the mag's sales appeal), but some alterations are called for. (But, come to think of it, if you make him "look his age" in future issues, then he will appear older than he was in #1, thus upsetting the time continuity. So I guess any changes along this line will have to be in other than his physical appearance.)

(4) Why is King Conan red-skinned and his son totally white-skinned? Problems with subtle coloring?

T.M. Maple
Toronto, Canada

Here, good neighbor, are a few random answers:

(1) If sales hold up along the lines established by preliminary returns of issue #1, it's probably only a matter of time till KING CONAN is bi-monthly.

(2) Precisely what we have in mind. Let us know if we succeed from issue #9 on, when we'll be doing new, un-adapted tales.

(3) We've asked new embellisher Danny Bulanadi, formerly an assistant to SAVAGE SWORD artist Tony DeZuniga, to leave a bit more gray in Conan's hair this issue, to see how that works out. What do you think?

(4) Yep. Conan's skin is supposed to be "bronzed," and the color we use is what we decided upon as the closest approximation of it. Conn, being Zenobia's son also, is rather paler... but who knows? Maybe he'll get a suntan as he gets older. —R.T.

Dear Conan-People,

A few comments and suggestions. Firstly, the title: KING CONAN. I think CONAN THE KING sounds better, and it'll be less confusing when you bring back KING KULL. (You *are* bringing him back, aren't you?) Conan's resemblance to Kull in this issue is distracting and probably confusing to newer readers. Why? Well, look at Conan's hair! It's shorter in this book than in his other. That in itself is no big deal, but it's the same length that Kull wears his in nearly every illustrated appearance.

Also, I don't agree with the decision to keep Conan clean-shaven. I can see not putting a full beard on him because it limits the artists' facial expressions, but I think a mustache is definitely in order. One of my reasons is a personal one: I have a mustache, too, and if it's good enough for me, it's good enough for Conan! I think Conan should have a few more lines on his face, too, if he's to look as though he's "pushing sixty" as you say he is.

Other than that, I don't have much complaint on the issue as it stands. I do hope you adapt *Conan of the Isles* in this title. It's about my favorite of the de Camp/Carter stories.

Roger S. Payton
Hymera, IN 47855

***Isles* is scheduled to be adapted, in part, in the forthcoming 1980 CONAN ANNUAL, Roger--rather than *Conan the Avenger*, as previously announced, which will become KING CONAN #5-8.**

We agree with you about the "more-lines" thing, and we hope to work on it with Danny Bulanadi. As for the beard-or-no-beard controversy and its mustachioed offshoots, suffice it to say that letter-writers (admittedly always a minority of readers, but a very *passionate* minority) seem about equally divided on the matter. So who knows? King Conan may yet grow a beard.

We have no plans to bring back Kull as the lead feature of a mag, though, so King Conan — shorter hair and all, as would befit a barbarian become a monarch in Aquilonia — won't have any competition there. Look for a Roy Thomas-Alfredo Alcala collaboration on a King Kull story in our $1.25 companion magazine SAVAGE SWORD any month now, though. You'll be able to tell them apart by Kull's scar (initiated by Roy and Ross Andru, first artist of KULL THE CONQUEROR), if by no other way. If this doesn't seem quite enough, visually speaking, just remember that the first Conan story was a rewritten Kull story — so it's a problem that's nearly fifty years old!

Oh, and incidentally, Ye Editor/Writer must admit: Besides liking the name KING CONAN better aesthetically, partly because it is, after all, REH's own term for Conan as sovereign, Jim Shooter and I felt that it was better if the three Marvel-published Conan mags had titles which began with different letters. Such are the vicissitudes of publishing.

—R.T.